

**Stop making Sense: The Ends of Curating
and the Beginnings of the Exhibition.**

by

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Thesis submitted to the Edinburgh College of Art in fulfilment
Of the requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
2010

81,490 words (excluding appendices).

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Abstract

This study addresses the recent interest in the role of the curator as author and producer, arguing for the value of shifting critical focus away from *curating* and towards *the exhibition*. It proposes that, when thought of in terms of knowledge production, exhibitions are actually constituted by the combined activities of artists, curators, institutions and their publics. With reference to three case studies it examines how exhibitions can be understood as sites of collective negotiation of knowledge, and goes on to question the curatorial role in relation to this new understanding.

Beginning with the question 'How do we talk about curating?' the study observes the development of curatorial discourse since the beginning of the 1990s. Through analysis of this critical development and the frequent announcements of a *crisis in curating*, it identifies several perennial points of impasse for the development of the exhibition. The study suggests that these have arisen as the result of a professional model bound to a framework of cultural traditions, which have come to define institutional practice today.

In response to this rigid model, the study proposes an alternative in which the field of exhibition making is understood as a dynamic network of influences, where roles and codes of conduct are interchangeable and hierarchical characteristics prone to continual reconstitution. In this way *production* in the exhibition field is redefined as not only the making of art objects for display, or the forming of art-experiences but also the reception of these.

The study looks in detail at three exhibitions that explore ideas of collective and collaborative methods of production, curated by independent curators between 2003 and 2007. It considers to what extent and at what stages curatorial decisions influenced the forming of temporary *communities of practice*, concluding by identifying what can be learned from exhibitions when they are observed as experiments in the collective negotiation of knowledge.

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The Maghreb Connection. Geneva images courtesy Ilmari Kalkkinen. Cairo images courtesy Ursula Biemann and The Townhouse Gallery, Cairo.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to the following individuals:

- My supervisors Prof. Andrew Patrizio & Dr. Neil Mulholland for their advice.
- My interview partners Ursula Biemann, Celine Condorelli, Morten Goll, Per Hüttner, Helen Lykke-Møller, Tone O Nielsen, Trine Rytter Andersen and Gavin Wade for their openness.
- My friend and colleague Dr. Paul O'Neill for his support.
- My wife Anne Lorenz for her patience.

In addition I would like to acknowledge Edinburgh College of Art, for its generous research studentship award, which offered me financial support for this study.

Foreword

This study is in the field of cultural and visual studies, supported by the Edinburgh College of Art as part of its commitment to deepening research into the field of contemporary art curating. The study relates to my practice as a curator, art critic and educator and seeks to reflect upon several key questions that have arisen in my work in these disciplines over the last decade. The study acknowledges that there is a lack of benchmarking or data-gathering in this field, but does not seek to extend such quantitative research, preferring to explore ideas by working with the more subjective tools of interviews and analysis of existing literature. It is not the aim of the study to prove specific suppositions true or false, but to argue imaginatively, drawing on personal perspectives for the relative value of particular ideas concerning the making and interpreting of exhibitions over others. The study addresses these in a circumstantial way, focusing on a selection of exhibitions regarded as important contributions to work in this field from artist-curators and independent curators whom I consider my peers. For this reason my own position is to be seen as embedded in the debates I discuss. This study is more a cultural intervention than a sociological study and more a reflection on recent practice than a handbook for future curatorial work. In this form, it is my intention that the study will act as a useful provocation to fellow practitioners in the field of exhibition making, the expanded field of art practice and art and gallery education.

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Chapter 1.

Introduction:

How do we talk about curating?

1.1 Aims and objectives of the study

The first objective of the study is to consider in what terms contemporary art curating is predominantly understood by art professionals today. Through identifying the key debates about curating contemporary art that have emerged over the last 20 years and analysing these in relation to an idea of 'contemporary art production' as a whole, the study aims to ascertain what they reveal about the current nature of, and context for, curatorial work. To make this less abstract, the study synthesises a paradigmatic model to show how the curator's role in the field of contemporary art has come to be predominantly understood.

The second objective of the study is to describe in what sense the professional and more broadly cultural implications of a paradigmatic understanding of curatorial work risk being restrictive and inflexible. It proposes an alternative understanding of curating, by shifting attention to the exhibition as a social manifestation, in the process of producing itself (constitution), rather than a finished product awaiting visits (consumption). The aim, in turn, is to ascertain the shortcomings of the paradigmatic model in adequately recognising the key role exhibition plays within the field of contemporary art.

The third objective of the study is to consider what concrete implications a reassessment of the terms of their production might have for working curators. It aims to do this by firstly describing and analysing a number of participatory exhibition projects with a particular focus on the way they are constituted rather than attention to solely formal aspects or aspects of their reception. The study focuses on particular moments within each of the

projects where tensions between inherited and newly created methodologies and understandings of practice become apparent.

In light of the above, the final and most important objective of the study is to pose questions regarding the current tendencies of curatorial work and, without describing a new paradigm to replace the old, to critically assess the potential for change and experimentation in the field.

1.2 Critiquing and theorising the curatorial.

1.2.1 A discourse in the making.

‘Exhibitions are the primary site of exchange in the political economy of art, where signification is constructed, maintained and occasionally deconstructed. Part spectacle, part socio-historical event, part structuring device, exhibitions - especially exhibitions of contemporary art – establish and administer the cultural meanings of art. Yet despite the growing importance of exhibitions, their histories, their structures and their socio-political implications are only now beginning to be written about and theorized. What work has been done is partial, in both senses of the word, and surprisingly random.’ (Greenberg, Ferguson & Nairne 1996, p. 2).

The editors’ introduction to the collection of critical essays *Thinking about Exhibitions* proposes not only the importance of exhibitions in the creation of cultural meaning for art, but also the paucity of commentary about this importance. They argue, like a number of others in the fifteen years since the anthologies publication, that the exhibition not the artwork is the primary site of exchange. In doing so they challenge the focus on artists, their lives and their works favoured by conventional art historians and art critics. When they published their anthology in 1996, Reesa Greenberg, Bruce Ferguson

and Sandy Nairne were responding to signs of a serious, sustainable critical and theoretical discourse emerging around exhibition making. Important amongst these signs were developments in the academic field, in the form of curatorial study programs, and new manifestations of the globalised art scene, in the form of international biennial exhibitions. The first curatorial study programs in Europe emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s; L'École Du Magasin opened in Grenoble in 1987, The Royal College of Art MA in London, in 1992, the curating program at De Appel in Amsterdam in 1994 and all demanded that students not only have a sound grasp of practical concerns related to exhibition making, but also required that they write theses on the topic. The same period saw the beginnings of the boom in biennial exhibitions and with them the inevitable rise in visibility of the curators selected to compose them; big characters for big projects. The Istanbul Biennial was founded in 1987, The Werkleitz Biennial for Media Art in 1993, the Johannesburg Biennale in 1995 and the touring European biennial, Manifesta, was first staged in Rotterdam in 1996. Attitudes towards exhibition making were changing, both inside and outside the institutions and, by 1996, the need for specific critical and theoretical discourse about the role of the curator was, in Western Europe at least, perceived by many as long overdue.

Greenberg, Ferguson and Nairne were, of course, not alone in their attention to the issues of exhibition making at this time, but their anthology published by Routledge for a readership of arts professionals and students serves to illustrate that, by the mid-1990s, there was enough general interest in curating and specific activity in the academic field to make such a publication feasible. The growth of critical and art historical material on the topic was to continue and the following decade is arguably the most important to date in the establishment of curating as a theoretical discipline in its own right, worthy of study, analysis and historicization. The progress of this attention to contemporary art curating can be witnessed primarily, but not exclusively, in the growth of published material and in the number of symposiums and discussions on the topic. Less measurably, it is also to be observed in the

increasingly common reference to curating and curators in informal verbal or online discussion about contemporary art; discussions engaged in for the most part by arts professionals. This study takes published texts as its primary source material, while referencing anecdote and referring to interviews conducted in the course of the research. Since 1990 the growth of published material on the topic of curating has been exponential with a total of 14 anthologies on the subject appearing in the English language since 2000, compared with five in the preceding decade (some of which are discussed below and a full list of which is included in the bibliography). Despite this growth however, ten to fifteen years represents a notably short genesis for a discourse and in comparison to contemporary theatre direction, choreography, and music production there is still a comparative lack of literature specifically addressing the issues involved in contemporary art curating. Despite the progress made since the mid 1990s and a feeling amongst many that the topic is over-addressed, the subjectivity and partiality of what has been produced, still remain the main challenges for researchers looking at activity in this field.

1.2.2 Discourse building since 1990 – symposiums and publications.

Considering that the majority of museum curators stand by the classification of contemporary art as that produced ‘from 1960 to the present time’ (Heinich 1998, p.2) it is perhaps surprising that, aside from a handful of isolated examples, critical and theoretical texts on the subject are a recent development. Today, in 2009, we can only pragmatically talk of a specific critical debate about the curating of contemporary art existing for around the last thirty years, with the vast majority of published material and public discussion emerging, as explained, in the latter third of that time period. Since 1990 the specific critical and theoretical discourse has been developed for the most part by curatorial practitioners themselves, with over a third of the published material resulting from increasingly frequent symposiums about curating, including meetings like *Stopping the Process* (Hannula, 1998), organised by NIFCA in Helsinki, *Curating Degree Zero* (Richter &

Schmidt, 1999) organised in Bremen in the same year and *Curating in the 21st Century* (Wade, 2000) at the New Art Gallery Walsall. *Kunst des Austellens* (Huber, Locher & Schulte, 2002) also stemmed from a symposium, and is the first large anthology on the topic to be published in the German language. In addition to these we find various publications containing selected curatorial statements, like Carin Kuoni's edited booklet *Words of Wisdom: A Curator's Vade Mecum* (Kuoni, 2001), *Men in Black*, produced by Künstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin (Tannert & Tischler, 2004) and Paula Marincola's *What Makes a Great Exhibition?* (Marincola, 2006). Less formal interviews and discussions have formed the basis of publications like Carolee Thea's *Foci: Interviews with 10 International Curators* (Thea, 2001) and the *The Producers : Contemporary Curators in Conversation* series (Hiller & Martin, 2001 & 2002) produced for the Baltic Arts Centre and University of Newcastle. *Thinking about Exhibitions* stands more or less alone as a consciously broad-reaching anthology of critical essays on the subject, perhaps because it stemmed from a time when an overview to the subject seemed necessary. More recently, slimmer and more specialist anthologies are common, responding to a need to deal with particular issues in more depth: good examples being *The Edge of Everything: Reflections on Curatorial Practice* (Thomas, 2002) and *Beyond the Box, Diverging Curatorial Practice* (Townsend, 2003) both published by The Banff Centre Press, Paul O'Neill's *Curating Subjects* (O'Neill, 2007) and Joasia Krysa's *Curating Immateriality The Work of the Curator in the Age of Network Systems* (Krysa, 2006). Krysa's edited anthology concentrates specifically on the issues faced by new-media curators and represents how, towards the end of the decade, we can observe specific sub-categories of curatorial discourse being defined, whether media-specific or in relation to particular nomadic, or critical approaches. Further examples of this specialisation include, *Exhibition Experiments* (Basu & Macdonald, 2007), which deals with experimental approaches to exhibitionary practice, and *Curating Critique* (Drabble & Richter 2008), which gathers texts examining the critical heritage and potential of the art exhibition.

We have also witnessed a growth in the number of independent articles about curating published in art and design magazines, good examples of which are Anna Harding's guest edited issue of *Art and Design Magazine* entitled *Curating the Contemporary Art Museum and Beyond* (Harding, 1997), Clemens Krümmel's themed issue of *Texte Zur Kunst* magazine, *Ausstellungen, Vom Display zur Animation* (Krümmel, 2001) articles by Paul O'Neill and Alex Farquarson in *Art Monthly* between 2003 and 2005, and by Robert Storr for *Frieze* in 2005. Last but by no means least in terms of the quantity and quality of discursive material they present, websites, online discussion lists and blogs can also be seen as an important source, the longest standing of which, logically, address the issues facing the curating of new media art, like the CRUMB list (www.crumbweb.org) and website run by Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook from Sunderland University and to a certain extent [thecuratorial.network](http://www.curatorial.net) (www.curatorial.net) established in 2008 by amongst others Joasia Krysa. Although including information for curators of new media [thecuratorial.network](http://www.curatorial.net)'s remit is much broader than CRUMB focussing on critical debate, collaborations and exchange across the whole range of curatorial activities. Other web-based platforms of note include the now inactive [Discordia](http://www.discordia.us) (www.discordia.us) list and the site [EIPCP](http://www.eipcp.net) (www.eipcp.net), with its occasional focus on curating in relation to changes in the nature of the public sphere and European cultural policy.

To place all of the above in perspective, regardless of their institutional or artistic allegiances, the authors of this relatively new discourse are still exceptions to the rule. Self-reflexive texts by curators are by no means the norm and it remains the case that despite the fact that most contemporary art curators regularly publish texts, only a small percentage of them touch on their own work in their writing. Most texts authored by these curators, in line with art criticism as a whole, discuss the practices of the artists whose work they choose to exhibit, rather than reflecting critically on the separate decisions and longer term strategies involved in the making of the exhibitions themselves. From this we can gather that for the majority of practitioners the development of a discourse about their own production can still be seen as

separate, and of secondary importance, to the discourse about the production of the artists they work with. We should exercise caution about relying strictly on published material to observe the level of self-reflexivity in the field, and the lack of such writing does not automatically denote that curators, critics and artists did not share critical observations on the art of making exhibitions in their verbal exchanges. However, in relation to the growth of the arts sector since the 1990s we should accept that the comparative lack of discourse suggests that only a minority of curators have felt compelled to make self-reflexive observations public.

1.2.3 Pre 1990 - the roots of a curatorial discourse.

Taking a step further back, we can ascertain that before 1990, contemporary art curating was rarely the focus of critical or analytical texts, and of the relevant literature that exists before this date, the majority touches on issues that can be seen as tangentially related to exhibition making rather than addressing either the figure of the curator, or the form of the exhibition as its main subject matter. These texts on related issues can be seen as providing a general prehistory for the specific discourse on contemporary art curating that emerged in the 1990s, and if we observe the historical references in more recent texts it is easy to trace the semblance of a canon of sorts, albeit a fractured and, to date, unwritten one.

The references favoured by curators and critics in their discussion of curating can be traced to three distinct but inter-related discourses. Arguably, the richest of these is the writing of artists, the second most common source the writings of cultural theorists and museologists and the third the writings of art historians and critics. This latter group are seen to provide potentially less material of importance to contemporary art curators than artists and cultural theorists raises the question of whether specialists tasked with looking at the present and past of art production were unconsciously overlooking the significance of its display, or if unspoken rules required them to uphold a veto on engaging critically with this issue. The strong reliance on

cultural theory and museology as the basis for curatorial theory, and for the practice it informs, makes clear the debt to the social sciences as much as to the arts.

If the last decade can be seen as the most important for the development of a specific curatorial discourse, the second most significant period, and the one where a significant proportion of the prehistory for the present debate about curating was laid down is undoubtedly the late 1960s and the 1970s. This is not to say that other periods are not important, and the current growing interest in the relationships between patrons and exhibition designers in the 1920s and 1950s (for example Alexander Dornier and Friedrich Kiesler) attests to this fact. Indeed a specific cross-section of curators claim that a form of conservative cultural amnesia is at work regarding the recognition of an extended history of experimental exhibition forms for art (Staniszewski, 1998). But, whereas debate still exists about the precise relevance of practice and literature of other periods, a number of texts from artists, critics and theorists between 1969 and 1978, are universally recognised as influential on developments in the field of contemporary art curating. To take a few examples, we might look at the prevalence of references to Brian O'Doherty's *Inside the White Cube : the Ideology of the Gallery Space* (O'Doherty, 1976), the ideas of Seth Siegelaub, perhaps best represented in his discussion with Charles Harrison, *On exhibitions and the world at large* (Siegelaub & Harrison, 1969), the observations of Daniel Buren, concisely covered in *The function of an exhibition* (Buren, 1973) and Lucy R Lippard's book *Six years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (Lippard 1973). Broadly speaking, we can see the concerns of these artist-critics as being representative of the reconsideration of object-based artistic practice against the backdrop of the emergence of conceptual art, performance art and *first-wave* institutional critique in the 1960s.

This period also provides a significant proportion of the theoretical texts that have also become an established part of the curator's canon. As examples we might take texts from the social sciences and from philosophy. The writings

of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, in particular *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Bourdieu, 1984) first published in French in 1979, have been important for curators considering issues of public engagement, for different but related reasons we see frequent references to the writings of Michel Foucault, for example *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Foucault, 1977), with its reference to Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon and post-structuralist conclusions about the relationship between power and knowledge. It is significant that both the majority of theorists in the canon are informed by the neo-marxist, critical social theory of the Frankfurt School, particularly the ideas of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (Horkheimer, 1972. Adorno & Horkheimer, 1951). Indeed, it can be argued, with reference to the discourse, that the most common cultural viewpoint amongst contemporary art curators in Europe is arguably a post-structuralist one (Russell, 1989). This sensibility informs their practice on the one hand, and also frames the terms of its effectiveness on the other. The issues of power and the public are balanced out by a related focus on authorship and subjectivity. Foucault was interested in assessing and challenging modernist understandings of authorship structures, and he published *What is an Author in Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (Foucault, 1977), the same year as Roland Barthes' more prominent text on 'the death of the author' appeared in *Image Music Text* (Barthes, 1977). Both works feature frequently in the debate around the curator as author and more broadly in questions of reception and the engagement of publics for art.

In regard to both the history and present of the art institution and its relation to its publics, ideas emerging from the fields of Museology, Museum Studies and Social Anthropology have had a significant impact on curators. The ideas of Tony Bennett in relation to the 19th century museum are discussed later in the study. In addition to his influential book *The Birth of the Museum* (Bennett, 1995) other texts of importance include Eilean Hooper Greenhill's *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (Hooper Greenhill, 1992) and *Museum, Media Message* (Hooper Greenhill, 1995), sections of Peter Vergo's compilation *The New Museology* (Vergo, 1989), James Clifford's *Museum's*

as *Contact Zones* (Clifford, 1997) and Sharon Macdonald's *Theorising Museums* (Fyfe & Macdonald, 1996) and *The Politics of Display* (Macdonald, 1998) precursors to her more recent research, which applies actor-network theory and assemblage theory to the contemporary exhibition (Basu & Macdonald, 2007).

Central to this canon, and to the ongoing debate about curating contemporary art, are critical texts that address the institutional function after the so-called crisis in modernism. The bourgeois roots of the art museum, its Enlightenment beginnings, colonial affiliations and unspoken commercial connections became, for the first time during this period, the subject as well as the backdrop for art production in its broadest discursive sense. Art's complicit positioning in the Enlightenment project and the ensuing process of modernism became problematised rather than idealised. At the same time the validity of the prevalent, post-war paradigm of the artist as solitary, male genius, the museum as space of objective connoisseurship and public as grateful enlightened subject, came increasingly under question. From its experimental beginnings in the 1960s, the late twentieth-century artistic project to radically reconsider the potential relationship between art and life first showed signs of maturity in the 1970s, at the point when it became clear that the new forms adopted by artists, notably conceptual-, technological-, sound-, performance-, installation-, land- and public- art, were neither insignificant anomalies nor threats to the established forms of artistic expression, namely painting and sculpture. Rather, they appear as a progressive impulse to build an art suited to the context and the time in which they were made, a consolidation of the diverse forms which have come to be described as contemporary, rather than modern, art. The commentary on dematerialisation, institutional critique and artist self-organisation of this period, delineate for the first time the need for a public framework within which to develop these practices. In historical avant-garde terms this describes itself as an art that demanded a renegotiation of the functions of the market, the state and the museum in the presentation of art, of the ideological agenda behind such work, and of the terms of their collusion in

this agenda. An important part of this process can be observed in the numerous writers and practitioners post 1968 whose work sought to revisit the value of art, be that economic, cultural or symbolic, and call for the renegotiation of received wisdom about the terms of artistic autonomy, authorship and representation.

1.3 Curatorial voices – the institution, the freelancer & the academy.

1.3.1 Writing about exhibitions - a challenge for traditional criticism.

However, as a small but well networked faction of writers, thinkers, curators and artists can be seen as instrumental in the initiation of this debate, the art establishment, at least until the beginning of the twenty-first century, seem at best apathetic towards the debate and at worst subconsciously set against it, as Ferguson, Greenberg and Nairne suggested when they identified that ‘writing about exhibitions rather than the work within them can be seen as a crisis in criticism and its languages’ (Ferguson, Greenberg and Nairne, 1996, p. 3). They argue convincingly that despite the fact that exhibitions and events have played a highly significant role in the construction of twentieth century art history, attention to the issues of exhibition as the context for the presentation and reception of the works have only rarely been addressed by art historians. Their publication appears to be an attempt to redress this perceived lack, with the inclusion of art historians who in preceding years do appear as exceptions to the rule, notably Rosalind Krauss, the art critic and theoretician who unwaveringly challenged modernist readings of art production (Krauss, 1985 & 1993) and wrote extensively of the importance of exhibition spaces and the behaviour of visitors to a generation of artists emerging from more formal sculptural traditions (Krauss, 1981). In the light of Ferguson, Greenberg and Nairnes’ observation however we have to set ourselves the question of why this influence has been so notably absent from mainstream art historical and art critical debate, and in answering it we must consider the overarching formalist framework adopted and upheld in these

disciplines. The understanding of twentieth century art in Europe, in particular that of the post-war era, is inseparable from the modernist approach to analysis and historical method, and the weight of this period is of undeniable importance to contemporary art criticism. This method, and the criticism it promoted has always sought to understand art in terms of its making rather than its showing.

Post-structuralist art history has done much to erode blind trust in the canonical and expose the hegemonic, but it has done so for the most part without moving away from a belief in the primacy of the artist/art-object relationship within the schema for understanding production in the field of art. In the language of the critic and the art historian, *art production* is still equal to *what artists produce*, what follows is mediation, communication, interpretation and reception and as such outside their jurisdiction. The inclusion of such processes in the category of production appears to challenge the focus on artists and their work and as such threatens the seriousness of the work of the art historian or critic. For an indication of this particular sensibility to correctness of approach, it is revealing that when artists themselves commandeer the terms of display, their exhibitions become a legitimate topic for critical analysis. At which point the issues of the curatorial and the reception of work are capable of being folded neatly into a formal discussion of the facets of the work. Indeed it is arguable that art historians and critics have most intelligently examined the issues facing curating when writing about the work of so called socially engaged or collaborative artists, whose work falls into what was previously referred to as a quasi-curatorial arena. Here a useful example is the considerable attention given by critics to the relatively modest series of essays published by the curator and art critic Nicolas Bourriaud in *Documents sur l'art* during the 1990s, published, in French, in book form as *Esthétique relationnelle* and then in English translation as *Relational Aesthetics* (Bourriaud, 2002). Bourriaud turned his attention to a varied group of artists whose work came to prominence during the early and mid 1990s, finding in their work a common search for social interaction, exchange and participation.

1.3.2 Institutional voices – developing a professional discourse

In relation to the question of how we talk about curating, it is provisionally instructive to identify two quite specific approaches. On first sight these appear to oppose one another, but they have in recent years found themselves increasingly dealing with the same questions, and at times pointing to the same answers. Large anthologies like *Thinking About Exhibitions* or smaller ones like Sharon Macdonald and Paul Basu's *Exhibition Experiments* (Basu & Macdonald, 2007), discuss exhibition making for the most part from the viewpoint of those either working within or writing about the large institutions and museums. The articles in the first anthology predominantly describe new curatorial practices as an evolution (Heinich & Pollak, 1996, p. 237) of, an experiment beyond, or a perversion (Alloway, 1996, p.229) of more traditional or conventional institutional models of practice. The vocabulary alone suggests how these conventions are considered as norms of production, relating to systems of doing things within museums that have become established over years of professional activity. Authors adopting this viewpoint can be described as thinking from the inside towards the outside, their point of departure resting in an institutional frame and their observations of change imagining a destination beyond it. Their tone in such texts is frequently historical, a relation to a dominant way in which things have been done and a discussion of the repercussions of doing things differently.

In *Exhibition Experiments* Peter Weibel and Bruno Latour co-author a text entitled *Experimenting with Representation: Iconoclasm and Making Things Public* (Latour & Weibel, 2007). Weibel, the director and curator of the Centre for Art and Media (ZKM) in Karlsruhe and Latour, a philosopher invited by Weibel to co-curate projects at the centre, use the text to revisit two projects at the institution and debate in which ways they functioned as experiments. The two exhibitions about which they write addressed the question of representation. These were guided by Latour's interest in

reflecting on the perceived failings of political representation by examining representation in the arts, a process he refers to as a movement 'from Realpolitik to Dingpolitik' (Latour & Weibel, 2005). In the introductory passage to their text they state the following:

'A museum exhibition is deeply unrealistic: it is a highly artificial assemblage of objects, installations, people and arguments, which could not reasonably be gathered anywhere else. In an exhibition the usual constraints of time, space, and realism are suspended. This means that it is an ideal medium for experimentation...

A key feature of an experiment is that it can fail. Indeed we argue that exhibition experiments should ideally be set up according to very precise principles in order to explore contradictory outcomes. Too often, exhibitions are not used in this way but act merely as a site for manifesting the autonomy of preformed curatorial tastes... The success of such exhibition experiments depends on careful planning and debriefing... Such exhibition experiments cannot, of course, be accomplished without long preparation and an intense collaboration between the curators and the "experimentalists" (a term we prefer to "artists"). The main point is that neither artists, nor academics, nor curators are putting their sacrosanct autonomy first' (Latour & Weibel, 2007, p. 94).

Weibel and Latour describe an almost scientific approach undertaken for the exhibitions they go on to describe, which is particularly interesting in relation to the idea of what constitutes traditional exhibition making and the role of the artist. Considering the innovative approach adopted for the two exhibitions, four things are to be noted in their description of these. Firstly the two ruminate on the exhibition as a medium, which should be understood as a common approach in the tradition of institutionally produced discourse on curating. Secondly they seek to contrast what they do with a vision of normalised production referred to as 'sites for manifesting the autonomy of preformed curatorial tastes'. Thirdly they stress the organisational aspect as

key to the success of the exhibition, noting the need for ‘precise principles’ and ‘careful planning and debriefing’, processes which in this extract appear to be attributed to their role as initiators of the project. Finally they differentiate themselves strongly from the artists, listing themselves as curators and renaming their counterparts ‘experimentalists’, a category they appear to impose on their collaborators but do not see themselves as part of.

These aspects, whatever our response to them, are noted here as an illustration of a particular voice within curatorial discourse: that which speaks outwards from the institution. The voice talks about change, attempting to differentiate itself from classical models, linking its values to professional criteria and practical concerns, and considering (and in this case conditioning) roles within production. Later in the same text an explicit connection is made between curatorial approach to differentiation and the ZKM’s character as an institution:

‘ZKM comprises various museums and institutes... Together these enable the Center to develop interdisciplinary projects and international collaborations. This model differs considerably from traditional museums’ (Latour & Weibel, 2007, p. 95).

The use of the text to promote the progressiveness of the institution is interesting and something that is frequently to be heard in such institutional additions to discourse, where analysis is mixed with marketing. Likewise, much of the curatorial discourse emanating from institutions and debating institutional practice provide us with an image of curators aligned with their institutions. In fact, in the most pronounced cases, like the case of ZKM, the curator and their ideas become the face and voice of the institution.

The aforementioned studies addressing the history of the museum can also be seen as belonging to this tradition of texts operating from the inside out. Essentially stemming from Museum Studies and Social Anthropology such texts are very helpful in the development of curatorial discourse, suggesting a

pre-history of the context for contemporary production. Of particular interest are those which address the creation of the exhibition as a normalised and ritualised field of production. A fine example of such an approach is Tony Bennett's *The Birth of the Museum* (Bennett, 1995) and his article *The Exhibitionary Complex* (Bennett, 1996) that presents a number of the ideas explored in the book. Bennett quotes Nicholas Pearson's study *The State and The Visual Arts* (Pearson, 1982) which interests him due to its focus on the way political ideology was transmitted to publics through the medium of exhibition. Looking at the nineteenth century, Pearson describes the state's role in terms of 'hard' and 'soft' approaches in the promotion of art and culture; the hard: 'a systematic body of knowledge and skills promulgated in a systematic way to specified audiences.' The soft, on the other hand, works 'by example rather than by pedagogy; by entertainment rather than disciplined schooling; and by subtlety and encouragement' (Pearson, 1982, p. 35, cited in Bennett, 1996).

Bennett sees no reason to deny that these two sets of 'knowledge/power relations' were in place or to try to reduce them to a single approach. In fact the duality seems important to him. Applying these ideas to the following centuries, we can see how example, entertainment and encouragement might be understood as keywords for the modern museum. But although the soft role has all but replaced the hard described by Pearson the 'complex of disciplinary and power relations' that Bennett terms 'exhibitionary' remain unquestionably in place today. This is a supposition looked at in more detail in the following chapters. Specifically interesting for this study is that in Bennett's texts examination of the nineteenth century museum, the concerns of the curator and those of the institutional mechanism are also seen as always aligned with one another. The curator, at that time the figure caring for the collections, simply underpins the museum's methods; whether liberal or dictatorial, and as such, in the spectrum of possible approaches to influencing the public he describes, curating is necessarily always understood as a technical and bureaucratic function without creative or critical potential.

Departing from Bennett's observations on the history of the museum we can observe in his ideas, the primary emergence of a vehicle wielding 'soft power' that in time has come to accommodate and demand critical and creative strategies from its employees, curators included. Yet his research points to the need for a review of the underlying mission of the museum, or at least a moment of transparency about its relation to its disciplinary past. This is arguably something curatorial theory is starting to do.

However, there are some who see the development of a theoretical discourse around such matters as detrimental to the profession. There is concern that the professional status of the curator is under threat from the deregulation of the institutional field, and that this deregulation is linked in a causal way to inappropriate or excessive investment in the idea of the curator as a creative role. These voices, discussed in more detail later in this and the following chapter, argue that curating is best understood as an essentially practical profession dealing with selection and display and that curators encouraged by this discourse to see themselves as creative have a tendency to produce a kind of work that is only accessible to an exclusive group of people and does nothing to advance the arts. In such a point of view the advancement of the arts is always to be understood as synonymous both with the logistical support of artists in the displaying of their work and with the quiet and dutiful implementation of institutional concerns. The problem for these critics is clearly the risks of non-alignment, of curators with agendas beyond those prescribed by either the institution or the artist.

Speaking in 2002 as part of a series of talks at Baltic, the Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, at the time curator at P.S.1 in New York chose to cross-examine her own practice as a curator and open up her doubts about certain kinds of curatorial practice that had emerged since the 1960s. In her discussion with Liam Gillick she described in brief the emergence of the 'first curators as individual and transparent personalities' (Christov-Bakargiev & Gillick, 2002, p. 15), mentioning Harald Szeeman and Jean Christoph Amman, and went on to

trace this to a tendency which appeared in the early 1990s which she describes as 'protagonistic' curating (Christov-Bakargiev & Gillick, 2002, p. 15). This is a development that she broadly forgave as 'an expression of a very interesting impulse towards collective consciousness at the time' (Christov-Bakargiev & Gillick, 2002, p. 15), but in hindsight saw as linked to 'the excessive role of the curator' (Christov-Bakargiev & Gillick, 2002, p. 16) at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Calling for a 'a re-investigation of traditional curatorial practices' (Christov-Bakargiev & Gillick, 2002, p. 17) she explained that her doubts about the creative nature of the curatorial role at that time had led her to go back to organising solo shows.

Interestingly her discussion partner at the time, the artist Liam Gillick, took an entirely different and clearly contrary line on the issues of changes in curating. He responded to Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev's concerns by suggesting that a more important issue could be observed than the question of which figure, the artist or curator, held the rights to creative primacy. Gillick responded 'I think one of the key issues here is not really the relationship between being an artist and being a curator but rather the tension between criticism and curating' (Christov-Bakargiev & Gillick, 2002, p. 26). Implicit to this statement is the fact that Gillick saw both criticism and curating as a facet of (his) art production, his worry about curating and criticism at the time is that it is not progressive enough to compliment his work. He claimed to be most concerned by 'the apparent dereliction of criticality... in response to what you could call the 'new curatorial consensus'' (Christov-Bakargiev & Gillick, 2002, p. 22). This he traced to the growth of post-modern relativist thinking in the 1980s and early 1990s, coupled with the understanding and promotion of the arts in a neo-liberal cultural environment, stating:

'Art, in a weak critical and historical context, can flourish in a neo-liberal environment, which is a good, written on a train kind of line. So we are happy to be in this dynamic British context, but we're also aware of the paradoxical nature of working in a context

with repressed criticality. This means we don't need critical and cultural permission to do whatever we want to do and there are good things about that, but there are very irritating things about that too. Because there are political implications in this lack, and personal implications about how ideas are remembered; how they are written about and how artists are contextualised' (Christov-Bakargiev & Gillick, 2002, pp. 24-25).

In the light of identifying this spectrum of institutional attitudes in relation to curatorial discourse, and before looking more broadly at extra-institutional points of view prefaced by Gillick's comments, it is important to pause and consider what is being raised here. Regardless of whether one argues in favour of or against the worth of the growth in the theoretical output on the topic of curating, support is needed for Gillick's prognosis that the polarised and hermetic argument over creative primacy is endangering a far more important debate about the critical potential of art and exhibitions in the broader cultural context. Weibel's rebranding of artists as 'experimentalists' freeing them in the process of their troublesome 'autonomy', and Christov-Bakargiev's worries about 'protagonistic' curators can be understood as two sides of the same debate: the one that cannot get away from the importance of the cultural capital awarded to 'the artist' when he or she assumes that name.

1.3.3 Dissident discourse – the curator on the outside, discourse as critique.

A similarly divided range of views can be found from the voices debating curatorial practice from a position outside the institutions. Amongst them are those reconsidering the issues of display and spectacle from a position that sees institutional frameworks as only one part of the picture, and in doing so addressing broader patterns of cultural and political production as informative models for curating. For a good example one might look at the work of the Kunstraum Der Universität Lüneburg during the 1990s, the first

activities of which are well documented in the anthology *Games, Fights and Collaborations* (Bismarck, Stoller & Wuggenig, 1996). The publication pools material from the disparate selection of artists, theorists, academics and curators who worked at the Kunstraum in collaboration with the students of the University between 1994 and 1996. The nature of the material is suggested by the subtitle *The Game of Boundary and Transgression, Art and Cultural Studies in the 90ies*, and further expanded upon in the introduction:

‘This volume contains examples of the forms which artistic research and self-reflection have assumed in the nineties. The analysis of practices and institutions in the artistic and cultural fields from the perspective of cultural studies, sociology, art history and criticism provide some idea of the ruptures, but also of the continuities, between the angles and discourses of these different approaches’ (Bismarck, Stoller & Wuggenig, 1996, p. 154).

Amongst those contributing to the publication we find artists such as Stephan Dilemuth, Clegg & Guttmann, Andrea Fraser and Christian Philipp Müller whose processes of artistic research and self-reflection have important similarities. Firstly, they all assume quasi-curatorial roles in their art-production. Secondly, whether in projects like Clegg & Guttmann’s *Die Offene Bibliothek* or Andrea Fraser’s project *Services: A Working Group Exhibition*, they assume activist or interventionist logics with regard to the sanctioned forums for cultural expression, be they the institutions, the public space or the media.

This difference of viewpoint is also made clear in the attitudes of Ute Meta Bauer, a curator who also began her work as an artist. As part of her presentation at the symposium *Curating Degree Zero*, she described her approach to the relationship between herself as a curator and the institutions she works within:

‘To us the role of the modern museum meant more than framing the modern by collecting and displaying it to a public. As the media shows, to circulate information is to produce the space. There has always been a symbiotic relation between art production and media and this is what is shifting in art, in terms of practice, production and outlook... Current artistic practice should be accompanied by an adequate curatorial approach... Museums are still writing art history, and nothing has changed here, we have to enter that space if we want to be inscribed into those histories. A big group today say ‘we just don’t care anymore’, then I say, it’s fine to be outside, but if you want to rewrite this history you have to enter. So I would say that my artistic or curatorial practice is a form of squatting, I have never been an expert in any of these fields and I basically took a chair which wasn’t planned for me’ (Meta Bauer, 1999).

The model of the curator as squatter and amateur entering the institution to open up a route of representation for particular kinds of artistic practice must be seen as a different model to that of the curator as institutional professional bound by the primary concern of the changing nature of the institution’s ‘hold over its public’ (Bennett, 1996). The squatting model opposes an idea of a controlled hermetic evolution of the institution, proposing in its place temporary and perhaps destructive insertions. Squatting is typified by its short-lived success, the aim being to be tolerated for as long as possible before being forcibly ejected. Bauer refuses to separate her artistic and curatorial aims for such a tactic and talks here in the *we* form, not denoting a professional *we* made up of institution colleagues, but a revolutionary *we* made up of all artists. The issue of tolerance is key in the construction of this working model as it is easy to see the benefits of squatting for the squatter but less so for the house-owner. The economy of tolerance here appears to stem precisely from this radical *we* voiced by Bauer, which the institution understands as potentially troublesome, but is attracted to because it resembles an artistic strategy. This being something the institution should be

seen to commit to and therefore making any difficulties during the working period ultimately recoupable. Indeed tolerance in this situation also denotes power, as the squatter can be legally removed by force whenever the house-owner deems fit. There is an argument that the model of the curator as amateur, rather than expert, is actually at odds to the efforts of many seeking to develop a critical and theoretical discourse about curating, as the majority of research and publication in this area is engaged with the aim of achieving better qualified curators for our institutions, and it is funded, communicated and developed under the auspices of expertise.

Alongside those extra-institutional voices that favour the development of discourse about curating, there are a number of critics and independent curators who oppose this, albeit on very different grounds to their institutional counterparts. In relation in part to the squatter and amateur models discussed above, they argue that the growth in the debate about curating, and in particular about its subjective and creative facets, can be read as an integral part of the process of colonisation of the artistic role by a bureaucratic or managerial agenda. These voices dispute the position taken by so called independent curators, like Ute Meta Bauer for example. They argue that such outside-in strategies simply further equip the institutions with the means of recognising, neutralising and exploiting transgressive and radical art practice. The argument continues that curators who broker radical artistic practice to institutional structures are simultaneously creating an economy of authorship and stardom that relegates the artist to a footnote in the master narratives of the curators themselves.

In the article *Harnessing the Means of Production* (Gordon Nesbitt, 2003), Rebecca Gordon Nesbitt supports this line of critique by revisiting the activities of artist run spaces in the UK during the 1990s, which were under-supported at the time, but in hindsight institutionally-celebrated. The article, commissioned incidentally by Ute Meta Bauer for the publication *New Institutionalism* (Ekeberg, 2003), examines amongst other examples the exhibitions *Life/Live*, curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist at the Musée d'Art

Moderne de la Ville de Paris in 1996-97 and *City Racing 1988 – 1998, A Partial Account* curated for London's ICA by then associate curator Matthew Higgs in 2001. Her critique primarily addresses the complicity of the artist-led initiatives that allowed themselves to be courted and subsumed by larger institutions in these exhibitions, she works from the premise that all incidences of artist-led self-organisation can be seen as 'synonymous with a political act' and that their incorporation into the institution at any point must be seen as 'an act to undermine this' (Gordon Nesbitt, 2003, p. 84) and turns the tables on the situation to critique the curators involved in encouraging public-funded institutions to adopt the methods of artists to reshape their ways of working:

'Following a gradual acceptance by artists and audiences of artist-led initiatives being absorbed into public institutions during the 1990s organisations like Rooseum and Kunstverein Munich are attempting to reinvent themselves by adopting the methodologies of such initiatives, including a tendency to show process-based work, retaining an ability to react quickly to developments in the art world and consolidating artists' networks with the institution at the center' (Gordon Nesbitt, 2003, p. 84).

The phenomenon of artist-run spaces and artist-led initiatives, alongside that of innovative public institutions like the Rooseum and the Munich Kunstverein, are looked at in more detail later in the study, with specific attention to whether we can sensibly make a distinction between the working methods of artists and their professional counterparts in the public institutions and private galleries.

1.3.4 Curating as an academic discipline.

While on the one hand the change in the meaning and connotations of the term curating denotes a freeing from its institutional roots in the museum towards a practice in broader cultural terms, on the other the last twenty

years have witnessed it being courted by another institutional frame, the academy. The growth in the idea of curating as an academic discipline can be primarily observed in the shape of a growing number of post-graduate courses, set up in the UK, Europe and the US to train contemporary art curators. The majority of these, as listed at the beginning of the chapter, are concerned with education to Masters level, but the last five years have seen a pronounced step in the direction of curatorial research, a new development to which this study belongs. In contrast to programmes in Museum Studies, Arts Administration and Conservation, these curating courses call for their students to demonstrate not only a practical grasp of administrative and institutional procedures but also a 'critical engagement' (Royal College of Art, 2004) in relation to the production and display of art since the 1960s. If we study their promotional literature the rationale of the academies initiating such programmes can be seen as an opportunist approach to plugging a perceived hole in educational provision (and thus seeing a new income source). The course outlines argue that such programmes address the need for new display strategies in the face of rapidly changing art-production. Their educational objectives differ from course to course, but make similar claims that they will 'bridge the huge gap between the day to day practice of making exhibitions and the theoretical background that is offered during academic art history studies.' (De Appel, 2004). This provision is seen as historically necessary because:

'Curators of contemporary art in Britain have in the past relied for their training on experience gained through employment. Neither art history nor fine art courses provide a wide-ranging consideration of contemporary art which also includes study of critical practice and theory, and detailed understanding of how art institutions are structured and administered' (Royal College of Art, 2004).

The shift proposed by the new courses is clear: a move from the specialisation and anonymity of the museum employee to a 'wide-ranging' role and the

development of an 'individual creative line' (Goldsmiths College, 2004) for the curator. This step is argued as a tardy response to the curatorial challenges raised by the changes in art practice since Lucy Lippard's seminal study of dematerialisation (Lippard, 1973), but it is clearly also an axiomatic move of the curator towards a cultural domain traditionally inhabited by the artist/author. This factor is of critical importance because it reveals a potentially contradictory drive behind such programs. The first pertains to the improvement of educational resources for curatorship as a profession, a field traditionally populated by art historians, with the addition of clearer skills in structuring and administrating institutions. The second suggests the development of qualities of critical engagement and authorial activity by the students, which appear historically at odds to institutional models of curating, while linked strongly to art practice.

The training of curators at a Masters degree level has been controversial, and bearing the aforementioned contradictions in mind, it is interesting to observe why not all commentators are comfortable with the new roles promoted by these courses. In reference to the French context in the late 1980s, Nathalie Heinich and Michael Pollack see the new approach to curating as essentially problematic (Heinich & Pollack, 1996). They base their analysis on the seemingly unbridgeable fissure between the definition of curatorship as a profession or 'highly bureaucratised occupation' and that of curating (the verb) as a creative individual practice 'reliant on the artistic realm which confers certain characteristic traits upon it' (Heinich & Pollack, 1996, p. 232-233). The former definition identifies the curator as an objective state functionary, the latter as author, and at one point they conclude:

'Among these perspectives, we found the emergence of an authorial position through the expedient of the exhibition particularly interesting to analyse in that it introduces, in the midst of the realm of personal abnegation that is the museum, a criterion of singularization, bestowed with a legitimacy where it

would ordinarily be disparaged as an indication of 'deprofessionalization' (Heinich & Pollack, 1996, p. 235).

Heinich and Pollak compare the most traditional of potential definitions of curating with the emergence of what they describe as the curator as 'auteur'. Perhaps to stress the radical shift involved, they restrict their initial definition to those engaged by state-run museums, occupy themselves with a lengthy description of the necessity for anonymity or 'erasure of the person' (Heinich & Pollack, 1996, p. 234) in such environments, and identifying the acquisition and selection of works as a key part of the curator's role, they attribute this erasure to a form of risk-management.

In her essay *Amateur or Professional?* Anna Harding references Heinich and Pollak and argues for a recognition of the curator as enthusiastic amateur (Harding, 1998, p. 89). She calls for a revision of the traditionally upheld oppositional relationship between concepts of the amateur and the professional, and in the process she suggests that creative risk-taking is now a sign of professionalism. It is symptomatic of the contradictions at play in this field that in her treatise on amateurism, Harding celebrates the shift of the curator's role away from that of 'ascetic official in the ivory tower' (Harding, 1998, p. 89), while herself director of the MA in Creative Curating at Goldsmith's College, part of the then relatively new academic industry around the training of curators. Institutional influences previously signified by the rules and regulations of the museum have become at once challenged by and compounded with those of the academy.

As previously mentioned the new line in education denotes a specific approach to curating on two fronts, the one administrative and the other critical. Already in 1992 Helmut Draxler felt moved to discuss how the emergence of this model, as teaching, should be understood as symptomatic: 'that curating is a completely institutionalised function today is proven by the many flourishing curating schools which have sprung up during the last few years' (Draxler, 1992, p. 18). His observation is of interest because it reveals

how Draxler, himself a curator and a critic, differentiates between the new curating courses and his own art historical education. His statement begs the question: why are the graduates of curating schools any more institutionalised than their art historian predecessors? Furthermore, given that the courses are for the most part taking place in art colleges, what makes these curators any more institutionalised than their artist counterparts? Draxler's contribution to the publication in which he makes these claims is brief, but to make sense of his point of view, we have to construe that what he refers to is something being institutionalised that traditionally escaped the academies and the museums. So, it is not really the courses themselves he is attacking, but the context for them, which he is describing as institutionalising.

To explain this Draxler refers to an institutional shift he perceives taking place since the 1960s. He describes the opportunism of particular figures (he mentions Kaspar König, Harald Szeeman and Jan Hoet) in developing attitudes that offered themselves as a salve to institutional uneasiness regarding contemporary production while establishing 'a specific practice which individualised various social functions before they became institutionalised themselves later on' (Draxler, 1992, p. 18). The problem for Draxler is when these activities start to occur at the same time, giving way to the development of an individual, social practice alongside the simultaneous institutionalisation of this. This double role, which bears a strong relation to the contradictions discussed earlier, he describes as a 'fatal polarity' (Draxler 1992, p.19).

1.4 How can we not talk about curating?

It is of specific interest at this point at the end of the introduction to summarise some of the points made within it, and see these as a bridge to the coming chapter. Looking at the range of attitudes towards the changes in curatorial work and the discourse emerging around these, we can suggest

that talking about curating within professional and academic contexts remains a difficult activity. Viewpoints both within and outside the institutions are divided on the validity of such a development and concerned about who benefits from such talk. Ironically even those voices expressing a reticence about the growth in discussion and debate around curating or who suggest it is excessive, add to the pile of statements that make up this very discourse itself. Despite the difficulties involved, it seems hard not to talk about curating, or put another way, when talking about contemporary art in 2009 the topic of curating is ever close at hand, albeit awkwardly so.

Rebecca Gordon Nesbitt's comments illustrate this well, portraying a moment in discourse where artistic, institutional and curatorial positions are locked in a form of stalemate, where change, whether the result of market forces and neo-liberal policy on the one hand, or innovations in artistic and curatorial practice on the other, is equally problematic. Despite looking in different directions the extremes of opinion, at least, face one another across a broad terrain and in the centre of both their fields of vision, whether from the inside out or the outside in, lies the central question of the terms of institutional and institutionalising structures in relation to the mediation of cultural production. Both institutional and extra-institutional viewpoints share the understanding that for whatever end there is a pressing need to rethink institutional practice, and this concern can be seen as a theme running through curatorial discourse over the last fifteen years. Considering positions like those represented by Bauer, the focus of whose practice has moved from collaborative art making to freelance curating to running an institution and, most recently to an academic post, one recognises the impossibility of talking about the relationships between roles in this field without recourse to specific examples. A lack of specific references leads to the unusual situation where we might maintain that an individual's activities can be seen as creative and critical when they are operating as an artist, but exploitative and bureaucratic when carried out under any other name.

There is a sense in which the situation for discussing curating appears rife with inhibitions - a feeling that we are perennially unable to act beyond particular 'fatal polarities' encapsulated in the term and the role it appears to describe. A more detailed analysis of the sites at which these inhibitions are most apparent is addressed in the following chapter *Curating in Crisis*.

Chapter 2.

Curating in Crisis

2.1 Announcements of a crisis in curating.

2.1.1 Constructing a crisis.

Given that written material addressing the role of the curator is still partial in its coverage, it is significant that the existent literature on the topic, and in particular that since 1990, is regularly and repeatedly punctuated by announcements of *crisis* in the field. The various terms in which these crises have been described and contextualised can be helpful in mapping the progression of a critical debate about curating. In an article for *Artforum* published in May 1975, the British curator Lawrence Alloway began with the hypothesis ‘that the profession of the curator is in crisis’ (Alloway, 1996, p. 221). He reached this hypothesis observing the behaviour of curators at the Whitney Museum between 1969 and 1975 and witnessing with dismay the growing influence of commercial galleries on the museum’s curatorial output. Frank Perrin echoed this diagnosis some twenty years later, although he focussed on the exhibition itself as the problem, not specifically the curator, and conditioned his observation in more optimistic, albeit ironic, terms stating that ‘the exhibition is in a state of crisis – crises are good for the mind’ (Perrin, 1992, p. 44). Critics Nathalie Heinich and Michael Pollak observed the gradual acceptance of new authorship models causing a crisis in the professional status of the curator in France in 1996 and Vienna-based critic and curator Maia Damianovic proclaims a crisis of the exhibition context in her 1998 article *Terminal Souvenirs: What is wrong with curatorial practice today?* (Damianovic, 1998, p. 187). So whether it is the profession, the exhibition format, the context for exhibitions or, as suggested by Ferguson, Greenberg and Nairne (Ferguson, Greenberg and Nairne, 1996, p. 3), the terms of their critical reception, crisis abounds. Indeed it has become

so ubiquitous that seeking a way out of crisis no longer appears to be a priority. By the turn of the Millenium the crisis itself had become a backdrop to discussions about curating rather than a subject of their scrutiny or a problem to be overcome. A report on the debate *Curating With Light Luggage* at the Kunstverein in München in 2004 points towards this approach:

‘The symposium addressed what we could call the crisis in mediating contemporary art, a crisis in criticism and in curating. It was a request for less rigid and consolidated institutional forms, a search for temporary models, for possibilities within the crisis, for pragmatic and, at times, low-tech ways of operating’ (Lind, 2004).

That contemporary curators, critics and artists are nowadays seeking ‘possibilities within the crisis’ may, on the one hand, suggest that we understand crisis as a positive state, where new opportunities can be discussed, or it may, on the other hand, indicate that the root cause of the first announced crises still remain relevant and that curating is in some form of limbo, marked by the increasingly weary announcement and re-announcement of its need to change.

As this chapter will argue, accounts of a crisis, an urgent central problematic of curatorial work, vary in their argumentation, their focus and their prognosis, but in all cases refer to a similar tension between differing schools of thought on the *correct* behaviour of the curator in relation to the institution on the one hand and the artist on the other. Understood as such, we can identify that the primary focus is professional, as this is essentially the terrain where it remains possible to discuss correctness in terms of codes of curatorial conduct. Diagnosis of crisis is at all times a response to professional changes in the art world, but as this and the ensuing chapter will propose, the resultant critique aimed at the figure of the curator has implications beyond a simple clarification of professional roles. With this in mind, it follows the logic of scale that the frequency of these announcements has increased with the recent exponential growth of literature on the subject

of curating. The breadth of the use of the term crisis also indicates that beyond the primary focus on the professionalization of the curator's role a feeling of critical change has come to surround the formal, contextual and ethical state of exhibition making as a whole. Furthermore, the propensity for the use of alarmist terms like *crisis*, where others might use *evolution* or *progress* gives some indication of the tradition-bound, hierarchical and rarefied arena of art administration: a field where change appears automatically catastrophic or alarming.

That crisis is a strong term with which to describe the situation must be made clear, even if the authors who have used it have done so unconsciously or as the tradition of the platitude *curating in crisis* has developed, uninventively. In common usage the word denotes an acute turning point and describes a moment at which two future paths are possible; in terms of disease these lead either to recovery or death. When considering the range of crises attributed to the field of curating, we can observe that few would consider entering a profession said to be in crisis, as its future is hereby inferred to be unclear or doubtful. Similarly a form such as the exhibition in crisis might be perceived as being at risk of being removed or replaced. An economy in crisis risks redundancy, and here we might talk of economy in terms of monetary, social and cultural capital. Perhaps most importantly for this study, a code of practice or methodology in crisis risks corruption or irrelevance. Arguably, the hypothesis that curating is in crisis has become so commonplace as to be a received truth, and the term crisis is drained of much of its potency in this coupling, acting as a more dramatic term to describe a process of ongoing change. However, the concept of a genuine crisis in curating, understood in the literal terms laid out above is in itself very interesting. It calls for an analysis of whether curatorial practice today exhibits signs of professional, cultural and economic precariousness, to what extent its aims and means appear corrupt or irrelevant in the current context and if the art exhibition itself, as a form, is losing its possible agency as a result of this. After investigating the arguments behind various announcements of crisis, and

evaluating how profound these are, it is these questions relating to a literal reading of crisis that we should return to.

2.1.2 *One crisis amongst others*

It should not be forgotten that there is a broader tradition of announcing crisis in art and its related disciplines, and that this may help to condition the term's usage in relation to curating. Quite apart from various crises attributed to the art-market, like that of the early 1990s for example, crises are perennially announced in regard to art production and to art criticism. Victor Burgin's introduction to his essay *The End of Art Theory* revisits a conference at the ICA, in London in 1978, which sought to address 'the crisis in British art'. His retrospective response:

'I never did learn what 'the crisis in British art' was; nor, I suspect, did anyone else... In retrospect...I see the ICA event, the brainchild of three British art critics, as a textbook example of what psychoanalysis terms projection: the crisis sensed by these critics was not in 'art' but in criticism itself' (Burgin, 1986 cited in Charlesworth, 2003).

It is easy to see how Burgin, the artist, enjoys passing the buck with some disdain to the critics. Critics, still quick to sense crisis, have shown more recently that they are willing to look critically at their own role in producing meaning around art. Not all are comfortable with the somewhat gloomy verdicts emerging at the beginning of the new millennium though. British critic JJ Charlesworth looks back at Burgin's analysis in his article *The Dysfunction of Criticism* (Charlesworth, 2003), in which he discusses the debate taking part in various art magazines on both sides of the Atlantic in 2003, including *October*, *Art in America* and *Art Monthly*. The central theme of this range of articles, symposium reports and points of view was the nature of a perceived crisis in criticism. Charlesworth responds to, amongst others, Michael Archer's article *Crisis, What Crisis?* (Archer, 2003) and Raphael

Rubenstein's *A Quiet Crisis* (Rubinstein, 2003). While observing changes in the critic's role, and the development of what has come to be described as art writing, he denies that a crisis exists as such, claiming that his peers 'protest too much'. In summing up he chooses a less dramatic turn of phrase when he talks about these changes, referring to the situation in terms of the 'current trouble in art criticism'.

Whatever we choose to name it, art making, criticism and curating are all variously enduring change and it is useful to return to the rest of Burgin's observations in *The End of Art Theory* and consider it along the wealth of literature from the late 1970s to the present day that charts a broader cultural crisis in the West, that being the so called crisis in modernism. If we follow Burgin's logic of projection, and apply it to the announced crisis in curating we might meaningfully conclude that the act of exhibition making is not necessarily at the heart of this crisis and that the ongoing critical debate about curating reflects crises in the parallel activities of art making, reception and criticism. Put another way it is practically impossible to look at the problems faced by curators without understanding the changes in the larger context. This study will go on to argue that the instability around the terms of curating are symptomatic of a deeply unregulated professional field, where roles and the power structures associated with them are in a constant state of flux; a crisis-bound state in which institutional, commercial, cultural and social aspects are in a continual process of negotiation and renegotiation with each other.

2.2 *A Taxonomy of Crises.*

2.2.1 *The institution devolves.*

To return to Lawrence Alloway's article concerning the Whitney Museum entitled *The Great Curatorial Dim-out*, the author introduces his hypothesis that the *profession* of the curator is in crisis by means of a typology, in which he seeks to establish distinct historical definitions of curator, dealer, collector

and so forth. He argues that maintaining the roles that these definitions suggest is necessary in retaining objectivity and criticality. This argumentation should not be examined without sufficient attention to his own position, at this time, as curator at the Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, a fact that suggests both his experience of similar conditions to the ones he discusses and his bias and professional reasons for levelling critique at the Whitney, a key competitor of the Guggenheim at that time. We have to understand this as a voice from the inside (as defined in the first chapter), an incorporated and subjective point of view and therefore treat his call for objectivity with scepticism. Although evidencing some degree of bias his viewpoints are interesting as a rare historical document addressing institutional change at that time. His specific focus on temporary exhibitions of living artists, rather than issues of exhibiting collections, is particularly relevant to this study of contemporary practice. Alloway observes a crisis occurring for curators as the result of increasing deviation from the traditional, trusted definitions of their role. Addressing the temporary exhibitions of his competitors his accusations of poor practice are levelled at the selections made for these, and from this focus he describes a weakening of the hierarchy-based institutional model for exhibition production and mediation, where suitable distance and differentiation was kept between the museum director, curators and the artists they showed.

Basing his observations on the output of the Whitney Museum between 1969 and 1975, he questions the growing evidence of relationships between dealer and museum. Observing the problems of nascent public-private collusion and the pressures this development places on curators to validate certain practices over others, he voices his belief that only curatorial impartiality will guarantee quality. Although he never defines the terms in which his own position can be considered neutral, he sees deviations from this position as a crisis. We can go some way towards understanding the system upon which he builds an idea of impartiality by looking at the passage in which he laments the changing nature of the catalogue-essay. In his attack on the increasing number of essays involving subjective and personal points of view about

artwork and its context, he proposes a comparison between the curator and the critic based on their shared analytical nature. The commendable critical impulse that he sees joining the two is described in fundamentally rational and academic terms.

‘A large exhibition is not simply a mirror held up to an artist who is then objectively disclosed. The curator is present either as the interpreter of a critical point of view or as agent of somebody else. If the latter he can be viewed as either the artist’s servant or the market’s slave. (By critical I mean a point of view that is thought out, consistently argued and checkable against other data)’ (Alloway, 1996, p. 227).

For Alloway the critical act and the consistency required in its creation is synonymous with independence and this he sees as best provided by stable institutional hierarchies in which curators are left to do their work, independent of professional peers who are busy doing theirs’. Similarly, in writing a good catalogue essay the curator should, in his eyes, keep their subject at arms length, avoid self-reference or personal opinion and base their observation on analysis not conjecture. This critical distance he commends in curating and writing extends not only to the relationship with dealers and collectors but also by proxy to the curator’s dealings with artists.

‘The position of the artist is complex in all this: on one hand he/she produces the work because art is a task of absolute control and personal satisfaction. But this aesthetic level is not all that the dealer and collector are concerned with. They advance by entrepreneurial means the work of art and the career of the artist through exhibitions, color reproductions and loans. And at this point the artists’ solicitude for their work can become indistinguishable from its promotion. As artists become, in a sense, their own curators the museum curator is forced to narrow his ideas to those that are agreeable to the artists’ reading of their

own art. This constitutes one more problem for the curator who might want to control his show... One weakness of the present generation of curators is their subservience to artists. Because the artist made the work, he is not necessarily the sole judge of how it is best seen, or even of what it means. Production and consumption are different acts' (Alloway, 1996, p. 225).

This is fascinating as it describes in detailed terms how artists begin to use their commercial muscle to influence the terms of the display of their work within the museum. Alloway, on the other side of the equation recognises how difficult it has become to apply his treasured critical tools to art that simultaneously operates aesthetically and entrepreneurially, and shows an awareness that the change in the marketability of art outside the museums necessarily changes the status of the exhibitions within them. Again the delineation of roles and responsibilities, here the artist as producer the curator as mediator, the public as consumer, are described by Alloway as cornerstones of a tried and tested working method, that are coming under threat from a new and dangerous forms of complicity between individuals from previously separate professional categories.

2.2.2 Codes of institutional conduct.

Essentially, Alloway's fears in 1975 are provoked by what he sees as the beginning of the decline in respect for a singular professional code of ethics on the one hand, and the rise in respect for qualities synonymous with amateurism on the other. The question remains as to whether his taste for structure and clear division of roles was shared by his colleagues or eschewed by them, and whether there was at any point in history a consensus on the regulations he describes as the traditional way of doing things. However it is clear that Alloway is witnessing the effects of some form of deregulation on institutional curating, and more generally observing a pattern that is affecting arts professionals across the board at that time, the collapse of imagined paradigmatic working methods, and their hybridisation and devolution in the

face of new commercial and cultural realities. To counter the 'dim-out' of the article's title, Alloway suggests containment and discipline as a reaction to this unwanted change, reinforcing his belief that curatorial work is capable of impartial neutrality and that these values can be understood in terms of instructions for a job at hand.

'Possibly what is needed is some form of association which would be as concerned with self-regulation as with job protection. A standard of ethics would begin to protect curators from reluctant, inadvertent or conscious complicity in entrepreneurial pressure' (Alloway, 1996, p. 225).

There is no evidence that such an association ever came about, or that Alloway or others worked up a standard of ethics and this article remains the closest to such a manifesto that we have. Alloway's comments provide us with a historical introduction to one of the key crises in curating, which we might call the crisis of institutional deregulation. This question revolves around the issues of whether curating is best understood as a *profession* with an associated, fixed code of ethics or as a *practice* with associated creative freedoms and, in relation to these models, how the role of the institutional curator can evolve, or is limited from doing so. Just as it is important to understand how the professionalism of Alloway's time differs radically from the use of the term today, it is also clear that the term independence as Alloway uses it in 1975 is hard to reconcile with the independence of what has come to be termed *independent curating*.

If we consider the aims of reforming institutional paradigms from the inside, through the act of independent curating, proposed by those present at *A New Spirit in Curating?* the discussion organised by Ute Meta Bauer over 15 years later, it becomes clear that Alloway is concerned with cementing exactly the ritualised, pseudo-objective approach to making exhibitions that Meta Bauer and her discussion partners are seeking to revise. That an institutional approach not too different from that proposed by Alloway is still perceived as

being predominant in Germany in 1992 suggests that he was perhaps overly concerned about its lack of robustness in 1975. A balance between commercial and institutional interests appears to have been adapted to and subsumed within the old institutional system. There are however echoes of Alloway's concerns about unfettered collusion between curator and market in Frank Perrin's short article *Minimal Curating*, published in 1992 as part of the *New Spirit* symposium publication. Here Perrin sees a crisis in the sold-out nature of the curators of large, market-driven exhibitions in the mid to late 1980s.

'The group show is more of a market tool or method than a real exhibition concept. A distinction should here be made between the collective exhibition – a hub around which energies rub shoulders – and the group show – a space where works are shown together' (Perrin, 1992, p. 44).

We should credit Alloway then for his perception in recognising where the early incidences of curators forging strong links to dealers were to lead - to a fusion of the interests of museum and market, and the minor adaptation of the former's entrenched exhibition model to accommodate the latter's promotional concerns. Interesting though is Alloway's unerring trust in institutional restrictions as a tool for opposing such developments - his belief that institutions could through the implementation of guidelines patrol the ethics of their activity. By 1992 those gathered in Stuttgart recognised that the institutions were equally proactive in colluding with the market as vice versa, the Whitney in its own way was simply ahead of its time in forging a relationship that many others were later to foster. So Alloway makes claims for critical practice in the 1970s that we read quite differently today. We have to question his trust in an innate ethical quality to the institution, where working for the artists or the market makes one a slave or a servant, working for a museum it seems comes with no such connotations. This is because the museum is of course the *correct* place for the curator, historically seen. Alloway is not asking himself what the benefits of questioning the underlying

bourgeois project of the museum might potentially bring about, or whether the changes in the way artists want to work with him might be symptomatic of what the institution is doing wrong. Read in this light his well-intentioned article can be seen as prohibitive of the emergence of new models of curatorial practice, collaborative art production and criticism. His argument is undermined because he fails to question the precise nature of the imagined neutrality he believes his own position represents. His defence of trusted professional methods appears not to have been reflected upon, excluding debate of where these paradigms originated from, when they were established and in whose interest. Similarly his argument that the acts of production and consumption are different and discrete goes unexplained, suggesting that the analysis he sees properly applied to production need not be adopted in relation to the terms of consumption, that there are certain places where curatorial criticality need not go.

John Miller, in his article *Curating and Materialism* points out the problem with such partial criticality, and reflects upon how curatorial independence must necessarily begin with an admission of latent, if unwanted, collusion.

‘No body of knowledge can exist independently of the system which sustains it. The problem for curators – and artists – is to grasp how they are too ‘functionaries’ of their own particular system, rather than individuals operating in a field of natural relations.’ (Miller, 1992, p. 16)

Miller unlocks the core problem of imagining that the activities of the art world are in some way naturally arrived upon. In fact, it is arguably the case that the roles within this highly rarified field of production are, as Miller proposes, functions of a system which is devised and maintained by the art world as a whole, and as such open for rearrangement by figures within it. Ultimately Alloway lays his trust in the compromised *independence* afforded by institutional professionalism and works upon the assumption that innovation (as denoted by curators admitting subjectivity) is synonymous

with unethical behaviour, and his proposed strictures to guard against the latter essentially to forbid the former. To this day there are artists, curators and critics who would still broadly agree with his analysis.

2.2.3 The institutional curator as public figure.

In their article *From Museum Curator to Exhibition Auteur: Inventing a singular position*, critics Nathalie Heinich and Michael Pollak begin in a now familiar style by stating that ‘the profession of curator is currently in the throes of a crisis’ (Heinich & Pollak, 1996, p. 232) and their argument is based for the most part on observations of the shifting roles and ensuing uncertainty in the field of exhibition making in France from the mid-1980s to mid-1990s. Like Alloway they are primarily concerned for the integrity of the profession and they describe their approach in this article as being linked as much to the sociology of professions, as to the sociology of art. The first third of the article is spent explaining why the personalisation of the post of curator breaks so many of the traditional professional criteria. They first describe the perceived necessity for anonymity in the face of the risk of error in the profession, given the subjectivity of art, the individuality of artists and the fickle nature of the market. They then go on to observe changes which propose an interesting contradiction at play.

‘We found the emergence of an authorial position through the expedient of the exhibition particularly interesting to analyse in that it introduces, in the midst of the realm of personal abnegation that is the museum, a criterion of singularization, bestowed with a legitimacy where it would ordinarily be disparaged as an indication of ‘deprofessionalization” (Heinich & Pollak, 1996, p. 235).

They locate where this new personalised function is situated in relation to traditional curatorial duties, and usefully identify what route this deregulation has taken in the museum.

‘It would seem that it is through the redistribution and redefinition of the functions traditionally given to the curator that the new positions tend to emerge. In effect, among four crucial tasks, which define the job (safeguarding the heritage, enriching collections, research and display), the only one which would allow a certain personalization – in the dual sense of the singularity of the accomplished task and any increase in stature it derives – is presentation to the public. And it is precisely this one which traditionally occupied the lowest level in the hierarchy of functions’ (Heinich & Pollak, 1996, p. 235).

The two authors here identify a paradigm shift in the curatorial function with its newfound focus on ‘presentation to the public’ and asking why this has occurred they see the growth in popularity of the temporary exhibition as a key factor. But this shift in itself is only one part of the puzzle they attempt to unlock in the article. Perhaps more important is their observation of the derivation of an increase in stature associated with this shift, pointing to a new set of external pressures on the museum itself from the outside and a new context where visibility also drives an economy in terms of sponsorship and funding. These external criteria for evaluation and ‘valorisation’ are at this time seen as alien within this context but have come to be the defining terms in institutions and even more so in the positioning of freelance and itinerant curatorial practices.

‘...the position of exhibition ‘creator’, regarded with suspicion as long as it is evaluated according to the traditional criteria of museological professionalism (collectively regulated, autonomized and desingularized, if not bureaucratized), is at the same time, susceptible to a valorisation produced by other criteria proper to

the larger field of intellectual and artistic producers' (Heinich & Pollak, 1996, p. 238).

This leads us again to recognise the fact that curators at the beginning of the twenty-first century are working in conditions where they share the same evaluation criteria as other producers in the field, amongst them the artists who they count as collaborators, or whose work they exhibit. When we consider Heinich and Pollak's observation of the curator as a 'creator' primarily concerned with 'presentation to the public' we come to reflect again on the issue of competition this provokes with artists, who traditionally understood their work as fulfilling these roles.

It would be a mistake to read Heinich and Pollak's article as an indication that such models arose in the 1980s. One can track such a paradigm shift further back to the vitally important changes in art making which were initiated by artists at the end of the 1960s. With the ground-swell of politically and socially engaged artists for whom the museum was in itself the critical focus of their work, the institutional code of ethics was revealed to be unacceptably elitist and exclusory. Alloway's article is interesting in this respect because the criticality and independence he upheld did not involve a question of who gets selected for the exhibitions, but rather how one dealt with the artists once they had been selected. We can imagine that both the artists' protests at the MOMA, New York between 1966 and 1969, and the work evolving from the conceptual turn of the late 1960s would have been well known to Alloway. Although he describes the problem of curators allowing themselves to be 'subservient' to artists' wishes, as a question of critical autonomy for the curator against market complicity of the artist we can argue that other things were going on which might have further influenced artists to 'become their own curators'. The demands of the Art Workers Coalition criticised the way museums traditionally worked with artists and the work of a new generation of artists effectively blurred the line between production and consumption.

2.2.4 New Institutionalism.

It is helpful to trace retrospectively Ute Meta Bauer's commentary over time on what she referred to in 2003 as 'new institutionalism' (Meta Bauer, 2003, p. 6), a term borrowed from the social sciences to mean quite simply 'institutions... trying to adapt to current developments in contemporary art through new means and methods' (Meta Bauer, 2003, p. 6). In 1992, we can recall her introducing the idea that critically minded curators were beginning to squat the institutions in the name of presenting and propagating new and radical art practice (Babius & Meta Bauer, 1992). At this time citing the institutionally critical artistic movements of the 1960s and 1970s as an influence and rejecting the commercialisation of curating and art making during the market boom of the 1980s she claims that a section of the new generation is 'moving away from business' and 'talking about ideals again' (Babius & Meta Bauer, 1992, p. 76). Certainly, with the legacy of the 1960s and 1970s in mind, the 1990s can be seen as an important period for a return to *alternative* models, with on the one hand the historically significant blossoming of artist-run and independent spaces in the first half of the decade and on the other the establishment of the practices of a number of curators with institutionally revisionist ideas, including Stella Rollig's work at Depot in Vienna (Rollig, 1996), Hans Ulrich Obrist's projects at the Musee D'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Catherine David's resetting of the priorities of the Documenta in 1997, early projects by Charles Esche at the Tramway in Glasgow and Rooseum in Malmo, and Maria Lind, whose clearest attempts at new institutionalism followed soon after the turn of the century in the shape of her programme for the Kunstverein in Munich. Where Esche's programme sought to redefine the possible functions of an arts centre and relate them to the needs and interests of specific publics, Lind experimented primarily with the question of format and its relation to the very idea of mediation. This aspect ran through the programme as a whole and was specifically addressed in the project *Formats that Transport Art* which sought to reflect on the increasingly received knowledge that new

forms of art need new formats of exhibition, new forms of mediation and new channels of distribution, while extending this to include a framing of format as curatorial 'co-design' of social art production itself.

'This increase in the importance of art mediation goes hand in hand with the increased interest in the medium of the exhibition and in the way the art scene functions: by which means is art transported and conveyed to the public? How do these formats also co-design the social function (or the role) of art?' (Grammel & Lind, 2002, p. 1).

2.2.5 New formats for new forms.

No one can seriously question that new formats are required for mediating new forms of art, or that Western art has since 1960 undergone a rampant formal diversification. In Bruce Ferguson's essay *Exhibition Rhetorics* he proposes a linguistic model for analyzing exhibitions, suggesting that exhibitions can be *read* and that the *voices* housed within an exhibition can be *heard*. The rhetorics of the title relate to his belief that these readings and hearings communicate in their essence an identity, that they represent an institutionalised story, and that exhibitions can be understood as the speech act of an institution (Ferguson, 1996, pp 175-190). Given the potential for diversity, he marvels at the lack of variety of these speech acts:

'As a system of critical representations, exhibitions must be seen in terms of their differentiating forms, media, content and expressive force within the environment and historical conditions in which each of their solicitations are proposed and received. The surprise, of course, given the multiplicity of forms of art, is how few genres of exhibitions there actually are and how few are animated differently from one another' (Ferguson, 1996, p. 184).

While promoting his linguistic model as a tool for analysing the character of art exhibitions, for affording a distance from which to see who is speaking, who is being spoken too and what the topic of conversation is, he concludes that when looked at in these terms too many institutional exhibitions sound like ‘a loud monologue followed by a long silence’ (Ferguson, 1996, p. 188). Both his suggested method of analysis and his depressing conclusion about the lack of variety in exhibition speech are mirrored in a later text by the German culture and media theorist Oliver Marchart entitled *Die Institution spricht, Kunstvermittlung als Herrschafts- und als Emanzipationstechnologie* (Marchart, 2005), which can be translated as *The Institution Speaks, Art Education as a strategy of Domination or of Emancipation*. As this title suggests, Marchart examines, like Ferguson, the way in which institutions voice themselves, using the term ‘Kunstvermittlung’ to describe not only the work of the art education or outreach departments, but to describe the abiding logic of the institution itself; one of informing and educating through art. It is of importance that Marchart, a decade after Ferguson, still sees the monologue as predominant, referring to it as ‘dominatory pedagogy’ (Marchart, 2005, p. 35).

Ferguson’s text is useful because he addresses the idea of analysis of exhibitions, and remains one of the few to have suggested a range of criteria by which we might try to understand what is being proposed and in what terms. The linguistic comparison is furthermore of value because it suggests a possibility of conversation - a counter-position to the monologue which Ferguson critiques as dominant. Such a conversation he maintains can only take place when the pedagogue’s booming tones are replaced by a hesitant, uncertain and questioning voice.

‘...if the exhibition is more often than not an affirmative narrative, analysis could begin to show how it performs its realist or its individualist or its nationalist narrative to maintain and reify social relations by acting to resolve conflict through exhibitionary alignments. It could begin to find its textual gaps, pauses, ellipses

and other tell-tale signs of strategic interruptions in its conventions and conformisms: its slips of tongues and anxious 'parapraxes.' In other words how can an art museum's face be composed when its exhibitionist heart and mind are conflicted? How can it speak realistically when its true speech can only be surrealist, fragmentary and incomplete, full of doubt and vulnerability and poetry? And mortality' (Ferguson, 1996, p. 187).

Marchart discusses a similar idea of the necessity for rupture in his discussion of what he terms 'emancipatory pedagogy' (Marchart, 2005, p.46). Helpfully he calls on an example to illustrate this concept, and describes his own role in the education project of the *Documenta 11* and the conscious wish of the team, headed by Okwui Enwezor, to design a structure for extending the project in an educational direction, without recourse to dominant methods of pedagogy. Convinced that this direction had to be initiated and developed by the learners themselves, Marchart describes how the team set about marking a series of 'slots', or empty spaces for activity of this kind. To give an impulse to the participants and encourage a breadth of interest these slots were apportioned specific questions. These included questions about the connections between artist's projects, architecture and display, about the historical context of the Documenta and about the practical experience of making the exhibition. Underlying these slots was the perennial reflection on the activity of meeting and talking that they represented, entitled simply *The academy unrealized – developing educational strategies*. Marchart discusses how the quality of experience suggested in this 'education project' differed from that more familiar idea of an education programme. The project logic is one of initiation without expectation of specific goal oriented learning, where as the program already suggests more structure; if it wishes to function it cannot avoid being programmatic. The encouragement of non-programmatic knowledge experiences appears central to his argument for the emancipatory possibilities of the exhibition, and here we must return to his correct identification that education projects and programmes are not separable from exhibitions, just as exhibitions are not separable from the

institutions that stage them. In essence, from both Ferguson and Marchart this study takes the metaphor of ruptures in speech, and the creation of empty slots between narrative elements as being key to emancipatory practice, and this is a topic we will return to later in the study.

Despite the continued existence of the dominant pedagogical model in most large museum exhibitions and public art spaces, we have seen changes, with a number of high profile examples of spaces adopting new discursive and process-based approaches to mediating contemporary art (Notably Depot in Vienna, Baltic in Gateshead & Palais de Tokyo in Paris). But, for the most part these have been few and far between, given the general growth in the number of art spaces overall, and often short-term, defaulting over time to more familiar formats or watering-down experimental aspects of their mission statement. For these reasons a conflict continues to exist between particular ritualized ways of showing and viewing art, which achieved maturity in the latter part of the twentieth century and the diverse nature of the art to be shown and viewed nowadays. The challenge for contemporary curators is clearly to seek forms and formats that adequately support contemporary artistic production and to avoid shoehorning new content into redundant formats (and here format can be understood both architecturally and interpretatively). The new forms can be understood as increasingly discursive, interactive, process-based and network dependent, rather than specifically object-in-space oriented and new formats seek to react to the conditions required for mediating these.

It is important to assess the relationship in this equation between traditional and non-traditional forms of art production, and how the last twenty years have seen no decrease in the production of painting and sculpture and these traditional forms of art making remain the corner-stones of the art market on the one hand and of the broader public perception of art on the other, and as such are of unassailable importance in discourses around art as a whole. The danger is in seeing the development of non-traditional art forms as in some way of lesser importance than or supplementary to the continued

development of traditional media, or indeed to understand innovations within the traditional media as being somehow separated from those of the non-traditional forms. Alongside painting and sculpture (often literally so in the practices of artists who adopt a range of media) new forms of expression have emerged and they continue to do so. The performative, conceptual and technological enquiries of the late 1960s and 1970s, the institutionally critical, interventionist, politically active and early new media innovations in the 1980s created the trajectory for the developments of the 1990s, a period in which the art of particular artists becomes talked about in terms of project or practice rather than object or medium. Such artists working today have been referred to variously as post-conceptual, process-based, socially engaged, relational, post-autonomous or post-studio.

It is dangerous, however to see the question of new formats as tied strictly to formal concerns, as the challenges that this diversification of art media present to curators involve not only the call for a reaction to them as form, but also to what production of such forms denotes in terms of an artist's economy. Working with non-traditional media often denotes a new economic basis for practice. Although this often entails mixing various economies the predominant importance of the commercial gallery is replaced by a variety of service-based income-sources often linked to a commissioning logic, and site specific or one-off production. Despite, as mentioned above, the fact that the reaction to such models has been slow and partial, curators have been involved in the negotiation of systems not only for showing the work of these artists, but also for beginning to sustain their related economies. Although no one has undertaken the difficult task of mapping the reaction of funding structures in Europe in relation to the emergence of such practices there is evidence that these structures in turn have encouraged and moulded particular forms of production. The growth of residency and international exchange programs, the ever-expanding biennial circuit, the number of new art-spaces without collections, and the success of agencies commissioning temporary projects for the public space point towards the mechanisms for supporting a project-based understanding of contemporary art. The

Situations commissioning and research programme based at the University of the West of England in Bristol has been exploring the recent history of public art, film and creative technology and the role of funding in this history. While the well-archived Crumb discussion list, founded by Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook in cooperation with the University of Sunderland, documents research into curating new media art and includes discussions of the impact of funding in this area of the Arts. Yet, despite these living examples, the problem here remains the sustainability of such practices over time.

2.2.6 The myth of the artist-run space.

By the end of the 1990's Ute Meta Bauer was acutely aware that not all her peers have taken up the rallying call for a new spirit in curating and she was also realistic albeit somewhat disappointed that 'a big group today say 'we just don't care anymore'' (Meta Bauer, 1999). Indeed, as the decade unfolded many chose 'to remain outside' rather than take her route to 'rewriting history' (Meta Bauer, 1992) from inside the institutional frame. Artist-run and independent spaces called into question the necessity for involvement at an institutional level as the growth of a network of small-scale alternatives suggested the possibility for side-stepping the issue of institutionalisation altogether. However, a side-step is not to be confused with an attack and although there is a danger of generalisation, given the variety of practices brought together under the term *artist-initiated*, the artists and artist-curators involved in these initiatives in the 1990s were for the most part far less interested in furthering or acting on the theoretical debates about art's political and social immediacy than their new-institutional counter-parts. Some critics argue that although not consciously following a political or socially radical agenda such spaces and initiatives did, by dint of their collaborative structures, social function and absence of public funding represent a radical gesture in themselves – art, exhibited on the terms of its producers.

Amongst the British commentators on the significance of the artist-led activity in the 1990s, Rebecca Gordon Nesbitt's statement that any act of artist-initiation could be seen as 'synonymous with a political act' (Gordon Nesbitt, 2003, p. 84) and Dave Beech's claims that artist-run organisations represented the natural successors of the historical avant-garde (Beech, 2005) stand out as exemplary inflated claims for these initiatives. In relation to these claims specific argument in relation to practice is notably rare. Definitions of what impressive terms like 'total autonomy from institutional hegemony' (Gordon Nesbitt, 2003, p. 63) really mean in relation to concrete projects and working methods would be helpful, as would a clearer definition of what purpose the 'social networks' and 'scene building' surrounding these initiatives served, and in what sense this was more progressive than its institutional counterparts, which also served as scene meeting points during this period. Problematically, this mythologisation of the work of specific artist-run organisations leads to retrospective claims that specific exhibitionary formats and functions in some way *belong* singularly to an artist-led tradition. In her analysis of Charles Esche's aims for his program at the Rooseum in Malmo Gordon Nesbitt maintains: 'What we see happening - with the institution aspiring to be 'part community centre, part laboratory and part academy' - is essentially a response to the working practices of artists and the energy of the artist-led initiatives' (Gordon Nesbitt, 2003, p. 78). That artists have, since the 1960s dealt with these formats and explored their functions as potential functions for art is undeniable, but that this work was in some way pioneered by artist-led initiatives is questionable, as is the idea that such formats, which are in essence appropriated by artists and curators alike from the broader fabric of society, should belong to anyone at all.

Despite sweeping statements heralding artist initiatives as in some-way different to other non-profit social groupings, the same commentators are always quick to acknowledge that many of the alternative spaces, particularly those in the UK, emerging as they did against the backdrop of the lull in market activity and cultural funding at the beginning of the 1990s, functioned

primarily as a tool for visibility and scene-creation in the absence of any official public or commercial avenues to serve this purpose. As Beech writes:

‘It is clear that a number of artist-run spaces are set up for no other reason than to catch the attention of the market and art’s large public institutions in the spirit of entrepreneurial enterprise.’
(Beech, 2005, p. 16)

And Gordon Nesbitt:

‘Often the original motivation for these ventures was an exercise in self-promotion in the absence of any established galleries offering opportunities for the artists involved’ (Gordon Nesbitt, 2003, 1961).

As it is, few critics have attempted to ask the questions which might allow or disallow such claims of independence and criticality for the artist-led spaces of the 1990s; firstly, to what extent can an initiative be considered *independent* when engaged in making specific artistic practices visible within the art-field; secondly, given that the vast majority of the artist-run spaces mimicked the exhibition and mediation formats of their commercial and state-run counterparts, by organising exhibitions, sending out invitations and producing press releases for example, is it correct to describe them as experimental? Thirdly and most importantly, what makes an initiative organised by artists automatically different from one organised by other individuals working in the art field?

2.2.7 The artist vs. the curator.

Veterans of the artist-initiated projects of the 1990s, and critics of this generation who share their views on the radical alternative that these projects proposed, are perhaps necessarily amongst the strongest detractors of new

institutionalism, working as they do with an argument based on a definition of all art practice as political and independent, and all curatorial practice as bureaucratic and sold-out. At the heart of their argumentation are two fundamental theses. The first of these, as we can see in the writing of Gordon Nesbitt, criticises the new institutions for absorbing the power of artist-led initiatives and adopting artistic methods to reshape themselves. The second takes issue with the curators themselves for authoring exhibitions and illustrating themes with works in a way ill-fitted to the artist's original intentions. We can recall here Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev's comments about the dangers of protagonistic curating. In both cases the proposed crisis is one of the exploitation of artists by curators and the general recommendation, in one way reminiscent of Alloway's in 1975, that they be separated along the old safe lines of producer and mediator. The artist and critic Mark Hutchinson, in a short, but insightfully polemical piece, for the magazine *Art Monthly* entitled *The New Curation*, can be seen taking this argumentation to its natural conclusion; a dialectic that sees critical curating as the death-knell of critical art:

'The claims of contemporary curation seem to be couched in terms of technical competence, formal innovation and a critical (or political) effectiveness, backed up by the axiomatic belief that curation can provide a critical challenge to, or displacement of, the normative procedures for the production of meaning in art. Such an idea of curation not only assumes the death of the artist, qua author, but also that curation can fill the vacant authority itself' (Hutchinson, 2004, p. 44).

Hutchinson is concerned here with re-asserting the artist's authorship position in a situation where a newly professionalised class of curators are threatening to usurp it, and on one level we can see this as a valid defence. However, in this statement he introduces the idea of displacement, asking us to imagine that there can be only one root of meaning, that this must be the artist and their work, and that the suggestion of meaning existing in other

places or functions within the art-field necessarily denies art's 'authority' or even as he puts it 'assumes the death of the artist'. Though aimed at resisting bureaucratic and political meddling his argument also amounts to a denial of the possibility of a creative collaboration between artists and curators, specifically because the latter position is presented generically. He goes on to call selectively on the example of the activities of 'a politicised faction of Conceptual Art' to assert that artists have historically fought curatorial influences, on the grounds that mediation of any kind represents interference by curators who can be seen as 'whose job was to come between art and its projected community'. In this version of history he pitches virtuous but radical artist-authors against their 'limited and trivial' curatorial alter-egos, proposing that artists are free from what he describes as curation's 'irredeemable structural relation to capital' (Hutchinson, 2004, p. 44). Again, Hutchinson's assault on the curatorial mixes constructive critique of the effects of professionalism and capital on the processes of making and showing art with a less credible generalisation which asks us to imagine the artist's position as outside this history, under attack from an upstart discourse and a new economy. The partiality of his argumentation can on the one hand be read as nostalgia for the era of artist-run initiatives, which as discussed are enshrined in a cloud of myth regarding the terms of their independence. On the other such polemic could be understood as symptomatic of the concerns amongst artists in the mid 2000s, at the height of the introverted and self-centred discourse on curating.

Although he offers no concrete examples in this consciously provocative piece we can ruminate that he is describing the work of those conceptual artists involved in the first wave of institutional critique. Certainly, as early as 1969 certain artists were beginning to observe and react against what Hutchinson refers to as the 'legitimation of curation'. Daniel Buren, one of the artists that Harald Szeemann involved in his landmark 1969 exhibition *When Attitudes become Form*, wrote in the catalogue for the 1972 Documenta, also curated by Szeemann 'Increasingly the contemporary exhibition tends not to be an exhibition of artworks, but an exhibition of an exhibition, as an artwork'

(Buren, 1972, p. 27, translated from the German by the author). It is taken for granted that he was referring to Szeemann's claims that exhibition making was a creative act of equal importance to art making. Buren clearly fears that this self-reflexive curatorial practice despite good intentions, risks reaching the level of and perhaps superseding the value of artworks. The date of his article *Exhibition of an Exhibition* is important as it allows us to understand the root of this supposed crisis and shows us how central developments in art in the late 1960s and early 1970s were to the emergence of the first outspoken author-curators. The critic Jan Verwoert notes this simultaneity that lead to what we might term the crisis of creative primacy.

'The contradictory situation that resulted from the changes in the division of labour within the art field which was produced by the conceptual turn in the art of the late 1960s: on the one hand the emancipation of art production from its confinement to traditional media opened up a broad field of new practical possibilities in which the figure of the curator as an independent agent emerged alongside that of the conceptual artist – with the result that the practice of the curator in effect came to closely resemble the conceptual artist as both set out to address and transform the conditions of exhibiting art' (Verwoert, 2006, p. 133).

That the figures of the conceptual artist and the 'curator as an independent agent' emerged together as an emancipatory process in the art-field seems clear, as is the fact that they worked closely together during this nascent period, despite, or perhaps as a result of debate about the legitimacy of particular working methods, forms and formats. However, despite the continued collaboration between critical artists and independently minded, creative curators, Verwoert is convinced that the question of power between the curator and artist is, at the moment, far from resolved. He references Sören Grammel's conclusion from his study of Harald Szeemann's authorial position (Grammel, 2005), in which Grammel argues that the problem is perennial, arising 'first of all in the very moment when the artwork is already

integrated into the curatorial concept, in the moment of its production' (Grammel, 2005, p. 30, cited and translated by Verwoert, 2006, p. 133).

His conclusion suggests that the crisis of creative primacy occurs in every incidence where collaboration, here seen as the integration of artistic ideas into curatorial ones, takes place between artists and curators. Hutchinson agrees, and argues that this fact must be the grounds for a revival of a separatist agenda, that artists must cease such collaboration because it denotes corruption of an imagined possibility for pure exchange with audiences.

Alternatively we might argue that the reality of curatorial freedom from market and corporate influence is, against the backdrop of an increasingly professionalized function for culture, utopian. The question can indeed be raised whether historically exhibitions, both mainstream and experimental were ever truly able to claim such an independence not only due to the terms of the construction, selection and mediation of what these exhibitions contained, but also in terms of the way they were received by their publics, written about and documented. Curators in public institutions are now expected to develop exhibitions in dialogue with sponsors, collectors and gallerists, indeed their connections in these fields have arguably become a more marketable facet than their art historical or theoretical knowledge. Degrees of independence can be observed in some freelance parts of the field and artist-run, collective and no-budget structures frequently make claims to a freedom from influences outside the purely artistic. However, precisely because it exists in a field of exchanges in capital of various kinds, whether symbolic or financial, all curatorial practice today has to understand itself as complicit in the process of commercializing cultural experience and supporting the market for cultural goods.

This study maintains that we should not imagine this as a strictly failed position, as complicity and involvement in these processes denotes responsibility, and with it the possibility to adjust and evolve these terms of

consumption, question the nature of the values being exchanged and ultimately renegotiate these. What we might choose to call the *crisis of creative primacy* is inherent to a system in which the professional terms of existence of artists and curators rely equally on an economy of specialness. As such, the activity of constant renegotiation of value, through the medium of exhibition, in full recognition of complicity, is a fundamental cornerstone of any critical practice, whether curatorial, artistic or both. This research aims to show how recognising similarities between previously distinct roles represents is more constructive in the present moment than a separatist positioning, which reflects a tendency to fall back on nostalgic argumentation regarding the primacy of artistic production and the supposed hermetic otherness of the art-act in and of itself. Such a position in its resistance to positive features such as diversification of practice, collaboration and co-authorship could be understood as conservative, regressive and counter-productive.

2.2.8 The crisis of institutional deregulation.

To summarise, the crisis of institutional deregulation, in some cases, has been perceived as a dangerous lack of curatorial impartiality in public institutions, a process involving unethical connections between curatorial activity and commercial interest, either from the art market or from corporate sponsors. In others, the development of so called new-institutional models has been criticised as exploitative, adopting as it does artistic ways of working as the basis for institutional practices with critical claims. Much has been made in the last ten years of the importance of transparency in curatorial practice, in relation to the fact that for many years the curator's work took place beyond the public eye (Ferguson, Greenberg & Nairne, 1996). These points of view present a compelling argument that the decisions of curators have never been impartial, and that their selection skills have traditionally been cultivated within institutions as a faux-objectivity based on a complex of exclusory formal, social and geographical parameters. It is clear

that similar parameters still exist extensively in art institutions in the West, along with the myth that exhibitions somehow still select themselves based on some vaguely delineated idea of quality. However, in the light of the repeated call for transparency, we have occasionally seen the invisible hand giving way to a range of openly subjective curatorial positions, in which the parameters for selection are firstly made clear and secondly introduced in terms of the interests of the curator themselves.

In its most extreme form this process may lead to a performative inflection in curating in which not only the interests of the curator are made visible in the production of the exhibition but also their personality, or alternatively, the issue of exhibition making itself becomes the focus of the exhibition. Clearly, when curators are curating exhibitions about the process of curating exhibitions, questions can be asked about narcissism and an overly self-reflexive system, but potentially no less so than when artists make art about making art; which after all has a healthy lineage since Conceptualism. Likewise when the personality of the curator becomes central to an exhibition or project, questions must be asked about what role the art practices involved are asked to take in relation to this dominant subject position, but again this is no more the case than when the institution itself cultivates a dominant voice through its exhibition program; a further healthy tradition. Perversely of course the more performative a curatorial position becomes and the further away curators move from an interest in upholding the pretence of a faux-objective role, the closer they come to acting like artists, and in the light of such an allusion their own enquiries into their medium might be described as desirable. Given the history of such curatorial enquiries since the late 1960s it might be time to identify this as another healthy tradition.

2.2.9 The crisis of creative primacy.

In the light of this, the crisis of creative primacy is understood as a product of the growth in the number of institutionally anchored or freelance curators adopting subjective strategies in their work and is criticized from the point of

view that it removes creative sovereignty from the artist, eroding the terms of their symbolic capital and thereby threatening the premise for public support and social acceptance of the arts. In addition to this, recognizing a creative role for the curator can be seen as an assault on art's autonomy from administrative and institutional restrictions, an encroachment not only in terms of authorship questions, but also in terms of a general focus on interpreting rather than simply presenting art. Specific underlying ideas in relation to the production and display of contemporary art seem to refuse to go out of fashion: firstly the idea that artists possess individual *genius*, which is somehow embodied in their work and secondly the idea that the *white cube* represents the optimal space for the display of contemporary art. Although these assumptions have over the years been refuted both theoretically and practically, they have never been fundamentally revised.

One of the most useful of the many reflections on artistic genius can be found in Schopenhauer's doctrine of aesthetics where he defines it as the individual ability to use intellect to rise above the daily pressures of 'will' (Schopenhauer, 1818-19). For him, the genius was, as a result of this gift, able to create objects and experiences that transported their audiences, affording them access to what he termed pure perception. In addition, the philosopher saw the highest level of genius in the non-representational arts, particularly in music, on the grounds that abstraction bore the least relation to that which already exists - the purity inherent in pure perception is here indexed to originality and the creation of the truly new. Here Schopenhauer makes concrete the central trope of the artistic genius, which from the time of Leonardo da Vinci, had historically carried connotations of aloofness or separation from real-world concerns. Around this time genius became associated with an iconic image: the popular depiction of the artist as obsessive recluse, willing to starve for their art, a state in which even the basic will to survive is subsumed beneath the need to create. Artworks understood in these terms, even today, develop a pseudo-religious quality, offering audiences emancipation from their every day concerns. This glimpse of pure perception is likened to salvation, not purely a distraction from drudgery, but

offering a momentary contact with the universal. It is clear that such an understanding of the artist, as genius, also makes way for the transformation of the economy associated with the arts. Patrons and sponsors traditionally had a high level of control over the appearance and content of the works they commissioned. However, as the genius idea became more influential in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the artist started to demand more freedom in this relationship, and even the patrons of the arts came to believe entertaining their taste was less important than supporting the artist's genius.

Four points here are important and still have their parallels in the art world as we observe it today. Firstly the idea of the artist as inhabiting a position outside normal society; secondly the idea that the artist produces alone and irrespective of social obligation; thirdly that the support of this activity should be undertaken with *no strings attached*; and finally that this activity has an enlightening effect upon its viewers.

It is interesting to observe how the genius idea was revisited and debated by the writers of the Frankfurt School in the 1930s, in particular by Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno. In perhaps his best known text, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (Benjamin, 1936), Benjamin recognized that the genius construction had led to a social understanding of art that, when liberated from its bourgeois constraints, could have a radical and emancipatory potential. He understood the construction itself as flawed and was particularly interested in how new reproductive technologies at the time were going to democratize radically the terms of the masses engagement with culture and encourage critical engagement. He named the feeling of respect and awe that the audience felt in the presence of works of art, the 'aura'. This quality did not rest in the work itself but in the ritual around it, built up through its heritage, the status of its maker or owner and its socially sanctioned authenticity and value. This is further reflected in the writings of the critic and theorist Clement Greenberg, whose conception of the avant-garde in his early writings and defence of modernism in his later ones were based on a similar artist model to Schopenhauer's notion of genius. Early

Greenberg in particular consistently defended art as a critical means for opposing capitalist propaganda, the consumer cultural material he initially referred to as 'Kitsch' (Greenberg, 1961) and later amended to encompass middle-brow taste (Greenberg, 1953). Like Schopenhauer he was drawn to abstraction, famously championing American proponents of Abstract Expressionism in the 1950s and later strongly critiquing the validity of Pop Art in the 1960s and the socially engaged practices of the 1970s.

The summary above and Greenberg's conception of the avant-garde as a whole has been frequently critiqued since post-romanticism and post-structuralism, yet in the press releases and interpretation material of our contemporary galleries, museums and art centres, we see a whole level of discourse that continues to promote artists in terms of their originality, uniqueness and genius. The critics and indeed the formats favoured by art magazines also play their part in supporting the idea that it is these qualities that denote value in an artist's practice. These platitudes form an almost ritual validation of difference, singularity and newness, at times regardless of the concerns of the artist or work in question.

The vast majority of institutions including those established in the past ten years adhere to the ritualized and entrenched forms and formats established in the post-war era and cemented over the latter part of the twentieth century. As Brian O'Doherty observed as early as 1972, the 'white cube' is designed primarily to stress the individual value of discrete auratic objects and with it discrete genius practices. Its interior-architectural characteristics also block out temporal and contextual factors that might confuse a reading of the work that, it is understood, should mean something in and of itself. The featureless walls and plinths privilege the formal and the objective, and once the public is familiar with what is signalled by such rituals the entire environment raises by implication all its contents to the status of art, even as O'Doherty wryly observes the fire-hose in the museum.

2.3 *Crisis, what crisis? – a return to the exhibition.*

The problem with a great deal of the accounts of crisis is the narrow terms of their analysis, focussing invariably on only one aspect of curatorial behaviour, and in doing so asking us to imagine that curatorial activity can be viewed in isolation. There is a difference between the overdue understanding that the shifting field of curatorial activity is of sufficient importance to require specific theoretical attention in and of itself, and the misguided belief that this *crisis* can be resolved if curating is sufficiently defined or confined to a particular function in the cultural field.

The observations of the first two chapters of this study suggest that progressive curatorial work is inhibited by a predominant wish within the discourse to define curating (and with it the parallel activities of art making and gallery visiting) as one thing and not another, and thereby to confine it to one particular role or another. These viewpoints avoid the fact that at the roots of the crisis we can find traditional truisms that underlie the very existence of the museum as a centre of knowledge, of the contemporary artist as a valued figure within society and of the market for art objects and experiences. Concepts of the artist's specialness are kept alive, just as the myth of the institution as an impartial representative space is continually resurrected and new life breathed tirelessly into statements about how good art is for the general public. These dubious truths, and the fact that professional lives depend upon perpetuating them, are the crisis bound parameters within which curators are working. Important to note is that curators do this alongside their institutional and artist colleagues, all of whom are equally dependent on the political tolerance, financial economy and social acceptability that these parameters provide. Audiences who, through their interests in self-betterment, also share a stake in the new cultural economies are for the most part unreflective and uncritical of the terms of this imaginary process of getting cultured, and as such complete a circle of complicity.

With regard to institutional deregulation, it is easy to recognize that a neo-liberal understanding of culture as an industry, and of art as part of a consumerist entertainment complex is problematic. The changes that institutions are undergoing to enable them to compete on these terms are for the most part at odds with critical understandings of art's social potential. However, opposition to all change is not the answer. Indeed there is a need to change, as argued earlier in this study, and our institutions need to evolve to keep up with the contemporary concerns of art practice. Given the centrality of their role in the creation of exhibitions, curators are right to demand that they play an informing role in such changes. With regard to creative primacy, the kudos gained from privileging of artists over other individuals needs to be effectively opposed. Critical artistic practices, like the corresponding practices of critical curators, work against an idea of genius. That is not to say that they deny skill and specialization, but that they understand that introducing their field of production as separate from that of others, is reductive. This activity perpetuates, often in a lucrative fashion for those involved, a restrictive misconception about the role of artists in society and about the nature of the objects and projects that they make.

Chapter 3

Models and Methodologies

3.1 *From the terms of production to the terms of the produced*

3.1.1 *Roles and Relations – an introverted debate.*

The previous chapters have looked at how, over the course of its short history, curatorial discourse has focussed primarily on the changing relationships between curators, artists and institutions. Critical commentary has invariably sought to identify where change is taking place and expose the hegemonic shifts parallel to these changes (the term hegemonic is used here in relation to predominance and hierarchy, or to put it another way, the issue of who holds what kind of power over whom). Discussions about power structures within the art world are an important part of any discussion about curating, particularly when roles within the field are arguably changing more rapidly and visibly than ever before. However, these debates are by their very nature introspective, dealing primarily with issues regarding the terms of production amongst art world professionals. Even when referring to a broader field of cultural production, the majority of the points of view looked at so far, attack or defend particular acts of repositioning specifically within the field of contemporary art.

We can see this approach to discourse consolidating itself in the first five years of the new millennium, the broader field of publications and discussions focussing on roles within production reflected in symposia like *Curating with Light Luggage* (Gillick & Lind, 2003), publications like *New Institutionalism* (Ekeberg, 2003), *Men in Black* (Tanner & Tischler, 2004) and the series of *Manifesta Journals* (Misiano, Van Hal & Zabel, 2003-2005) alongside quasi-curatorial publishing projects like *The Next Documenta Should Be Curated By An Artist* (Hoffman, 2004). These examples, which are used here to represent a fruitful period for discourse on the one hand,

must also be observed as revealing an important absence on the other. Where the terms of production are primarily discussed as relationships between *producers*, both the objects of this activity and the subjects providing a context for them are only occasionally warranted a mention. The issue of public engagement during this period, was for the most part kept at arms length from debates on internal institutional change and authorship issues, focusing as they did on the artist-curator-institution triangle, at the expense of other topics. Likewise discussion about the exhibition as a specific form or format, or analysis of the exhibition as a site were, with a few exceptions covered later in this chapter, notably lacking in the numerous debates between 2000 and 2005. The case of the discussions surrounding the English translation of *Relational Aesthetics* (Bourriaud, 2002) could be argued as a notable exception to this rule, but as discussed in the introduction Bourriaud's articles from the 1990s refrain from making an explicit link to curatorial issues. The examples of relational works are discussed as artwork, not exhibition strategy and by the twenty-first century the articles are considered retrospective. For these reasons the text should be understood as not central to the core curatorial discourse of the period discussed here. If we were to attempt a general reading, the tone of the debate in the early 2000s suggests that the behaviour of the public, and the effect of exhibitions upon them, was of secondary importance to observing the activities of exhibition producers, or at least that such a topic was more suitable for art educationalists than for curators to discuss. It is important to note that art educationalists were debating these issues at the time, alongside a growth in academic literature on museum and gallery education and the establishment of professional organisations and publications like *Engage* in the United Kingdom. In short however, when it came to the topic of curating, the time seemed right to discuss production separately from reception, and the conditions and rationale of the producers separately from what was being produced.

It is important to note that in any attempt to describe an overall picture of how both exhibition and audience garnered relatively little attention in

curatorial discourse during this period, one can only generalise. However, it is important to understand the general picture of how introverted this specific discourse had become, as this allows us to perceive a shift in direction in the middle of the decade; a moment at which a focus seen to be separate to such debates became central to them. This shift has much to do with the surfacing of a part of the discourse that had been developing on the periphery of the main trend in discussion and publishing about curating. Here we can identify a number of academic figures whose thinking and writing on the issues of the public and the exhibition during the first half of the decade can be seen as exceptions to the trend, and amongst them are those whose work has fundamentally contributed to this significant shift in discourse over the last four to five years. Their specific influence is discussed in the coming sections of this chapter, but the move towards debating the exhibition as site and the role of the public within it can be seen in the focus of several publications in this more recent period. These include *Exhibition Experiments* (Basu & Macdonald, 2007), *What Makes a Great Exhibition* (Marincola, 2006) and the German language publication *Re-Visionen des Displays* (John, Richter & Schade, 2008), which focus specifically on these issues, *Curating Subjects* (O'Neill, 2007) and *Curating Critique* (Drabble & Richter, 2008) which focus in part on these, and other collections of texts like *Taking the Matter into Common Hands* (Billing, Lind & Nilsson, 2007) and *On Knowledge Production* (Choi, Hlavajova & Winder, 2008), which act as anthologies of the contributions to, respectively, a symposium and a programme of talks. This shift in attention by no means replaced the ongoing debates about the roles of the curator, the artist and the institution, but it started to inform these in a new way.

3.1.2 We are all in this together – implicated and emancipated spectators

In her text *How to Dress for an Exhibition*, a contribution to the 1997 conference *Stopping the Process* (Hannula, 1998), cultural theorist Irit Rogoff begins an enquiry into the participatory nature of exhibitions, which

in the latter half of the ensuing decade has garnered increasing attention. In the text Rogoff describes and reflects upon her visits to a number of exhibitions and art events. What makes her position distinctive is that her primary attention is not to what is on display, but to the behaviour of the members of the public populating the exhibitions she attends. The title *How to Dress...* wittily reflects her interest in doing so. Firstly she is interested in exploring the significance of the exhibition as a site of a 'proliferation of performative acts by which audiences shift themselves from being viewers to being participants' (Rogoff, 1998, p. 131). Secondly she launches her enquiry with the presupposition that 'art does not have to be overly political in its subject matter in order to produce a political effect' (Rogoff, 1998, p. 131). In the text that these statements introduce she begins with a recollection of visiting the exhibition *Black Male* at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1995. The exhibition, curated by Thelma Golden, featured over sixty artists and comprised a wide range of images of black masculinity, ranging from paintings to fashion and advertising photography. Rogoff begins her description of what she saw:

'The first pleasure was to see so many Black men at the Whitney Museum - one rarely sees many Black men in mainstream museums in the United States. On occasion one encounters middle class Black women in museums taking part in the gendered economy of acquiring cultural capital. But on this Sunday afternoon there were hundreds of men at the Whitney, deeply engaged with the exhibition. The second pleasure was the realization of how spectacularly dressed most of these Black male viewers were - there was every variety of clothing from the round caps and flowing sashes of traditional tribal kanti cloth to Armani suits, to meticulously coordinated and elaborate sports garb, to the black leather favored by the gay scene to the tight dresses and fantastic make up of the transvestites. Every outfit was fully thought out, perfectly presented and very strategically placed. The third pleasure was the concentration with which the

numerous, long and elaborate texts which played a central role in the exhibition were being read - all of these exceptionally well-dressed viewers were almost performatively reading the texts with the greatest attention to every detail.

What had happened here was that through a complex amalgam of sartorial strategies, unplanned and uncoordinated, the viewers had in effect taken over the exhibition space and put themselves on display within it, virtually transposing the subject of the exhibition' (Rogoff, 1998, p. 137).

Central to her reception of the scene is the moment at which her attention wanders from the work to the public, and the accompanying transposition of subject-hood that occurred. This seems key to what follows, as she theorises about the implications of such unplanned visual participation, making a connection between what she has witnessed and the post-structuralist political theories of Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe and Giorgio Agamben. It is not the place to go into these theorists in detail, but Rogoff notes that the significance of this form of unrequested participation relates to the problematic nature of any politics of representation in which a model comes to stand in for a reality. The model here, the exhibition, appears momentarily replaced by its reality, as the pre-determined offer of participation (learn about art) is trumped by the self-initiated staging of participatory behaviour. Comparing this to other exhibition experiences, Rogoff critiques those curators and artists who despite good intentions and democratic aspirations towards participation misguidedly end up treating their audiences like mice in a scientific experiment (She lists *Take Me I'm Yours* curated by Hans-Ulrich Obrist at the Serpentine Gallery, London in 1995 and the artist Christine Hill's installation *Thrift Shop* viewable at Documenta X in 1997). The weakness she associates with such projects lies, she maintains, in the curatorial assumptions that inform them; namely the mistaken idea that giving the audience a task is paramount to democratising institutional patterns of representation.

Her dismay at these projects appears particularly acute when she argues that they go further than merely misunderstanding participation. By seeking to control the terms of self-representation within the arena of the art institution they erode a possibility that might be entertained in more classical exhibition formats. This process is comparable to the positive discrimination innate within identity politics, in which the position of not wanting to identify ourselves in a singular way is taken away from us as subjects - complexity, multifariousness and incoherence are invalidated. The underlying preconception that participation is about acceptance is questioned here - is it really the act of agreeing to take part? In fact, in describing the moment of turning away from the pictures to observe her fellow audience members, Rogoff reveals that participation may actually occur at a moment of refusal. Looking for an explanation of how this might be the case, Rogoff is lead to Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*, by way of Peggy Phelan's *Unmarked- the Politics of Performance*. (Phelan, 1993) Both Phelan and Rogoff cite the passage where Foucault proposes the subversion of dominance as revealed by the priest-confessor relationship in the Catholic confessional:

'The agency of domination does not reside in the one who speaks (for it is he who is constrained) but in the one who listens and says nothing; not in the one who knows and answers but in the one who questions and is not supposed to know' (Foucault, 1978, p. 64).

In the years following this text, Rogoff has furthered her enquiry into these unplanned forms of participation, and suggested in which ways they may assume the 'agency of domination' through contingent and performative characteristics. In the text *WE: Collectivities, Mutualities, Participations* (Rogoff, 2002) we begin to observe Rogoff's interest in looking at terminology and how it conditions the possible applications of discourse. 'Collectivity' is a term she proposes to 'de-nativise' community, a term she

can give to the arbitrary groupings she witnesses at art exhibitions like *Black Male*, without imposing an idea that they belong together. The term mutuality similarly seeks to suggest that something is shared within such collectivities, while avoiding the idea that they are bound by some unitary ideological purpose. The reduction innate within this proposed vocabulary is interesting in our context as it symptomises her interest in looking ever more closely at the dynamics of what she describes as 'the ongoing processes of low key participations that ebbs and flows at a barely conscious level' (Rogoff, 2002, p.129). These represent a counter, she believes, to the imperatives usually associated with participation and engagement within the artistic sphere, effectively arguing for meaning-making in exhibitions as an ambient process, contingent on a collective inhabitation of space rather than an individual reflection on objects.

In her talk *The Implicated – a model for the Curatorial*, (delivered as the keynote speech at The *Rotterdam Dialogues Symposium -The Curators*, at the Witte de With in Rotterdam, 2009), Rogoff introduced a further shift in terminology from the term curating to 'the curatorial'. She also introduced the term 'the implicated' as a revision of the term audience, encompassing also the professional, traditionally separate, categories of artists, curators and critics; the implicated referring to them all, while inferring their various but communal relationship to exhibitions. Rogoff conditioned the term curating as dealing with the mechanisms of staging exhibitions and their discursive sphere; of structuring what is visible. While the curatorial she proposed as including all that takes place, planned or unplanned - an expansive and inclusive term similar in function to the implicated. The exhibition becomes an occasion for what she termed an event of knowledge, albeit neither defining nor delineating what this event might be.

To interrogate Rogoff's ideas further we need to go back to her early thoughts on participation in relation to exhibitions, which she outlined again in the talk. She argued that the most important question regarding participation is not 'how can we take part?' but 'what does it mean to take part?' - two

questions she sees as diametrically opposed. We can understand the first question as standing in for the analytical and the latter for the performative. She described this as a shift in thought away from being strategic or trying to solve a problem towards 'not thinking in reactive mode'. This is where 'the implicated' comes into play. Rather than thinking about a general audience or generalising about the nature of a specific one she introduces this term to suggest the bond between the people who visit exhibitions and the site they find themselves in - a development of the 'WE' of her earlier article. Where audience is passive she proposes that 'the implicated' is more active, suggestive of a group bound by choice, albeit uncertain about their relation to one another or their demands as a group. Being implicated, Rogoff maintains, is an answer to this question of 'how not to be reactive?' as well as 'how never to distance ourselves from that which we are talking about?' It is not a representation of involvement, but an admission of entanglement within a narrative.

Controversially, the shift that these ideas denote is one where neither the art nor the curatorial concept plays anything but a relational role to the production of meaning. Their input becomes just a small part of the manifest whole that we call the exhibition, which includes traces of many parties. Rogoff's focus however is primarily the terrain of the audience members who perform the exhibition as an event, and as such they are granted particular importance. Yet these audience members are not interesting to her in their entirety. Her introduction of the expansive idea of 'the implicated' is valuable as it bundles previously distinct roles of production and reception into one meaning-making modus, namely 'the curatorial'. In this argument both people and processes are understood as linked and relativised by the process of exhibition. Yet the agency Rogoff seeks to identify is only present when an audience does not get overly involved, be reactive, reach conclusions or feel that the art or exhibition might mean anything in and of itself, which if the implicated is to include artists, critics and curators seems a virtual impossibility. For Rogoff these are all behaviours synonymous with 'ideological mobilisations... isolating imperatives of lost identification and

absolute attention' (Rogoff, 2002, p. 131) and as such simply the things traditionally demanded of us by artistic and cultural displays. What interests her lies elsewhere. We have here to ask whether she is still theorising about the exhibition as site, based on observation, or whether the notion has become abstracted so as to only be useful as a speculation on possible collectivities in imaginary exhibitions. It is indicative of such a move that while her earlier texts are full of explanatory examples and observations of exhibitions, her recent talk contained only one - an installation by Thomas Hirschhorn, which, when questioned about it, she described as being unrepresentative of her core argument and something she felt best discussed on the level of theory. The question remains how useful such ideas can be for practicing curators, as well as for artists and art exhibition visitors of all kind. Being the one who listens and says nothing can still denote passivity or acquiescence.

Rogoff is not alone however in her insistence that we habitually misunderstand the nature of spectatorship and its relation to participation and thereby to the political. There are parallels between Rogoff's explorations of the participatory and the ideas of another theorist formative for the discourse of the last five years, the French philosopher Jacques Rancière. In his text *The Emancipated Spectator* (Rancière, 2004) he looks predominantly at the example of theatre to build an argument against the classical perception that the spectator is passive *per se*. He introduces the idea that a particular agency, which he calls 'the visible' is actually distributed between those presenting and those interpreting - in the case of the theatre between those acting and those looking. Precisely this distribution defines the nature of the duality: domination and subjection. Though physically immobile the spectator is active, observing, selecting, comparing and creating the story of the story presented to them, a reality Rancière understands as having an emancipatory potential.

'The collective power which is common to the spectators is not the status of members of a collective body. Nor is it a peculiar

kind of interactivity. It is the power of translating in their own way what they are looking at. It is the power to connect it with the intellectual adventure which makes any of them similar to any other in so far as his or her way does not look like any other. The common power is the power of the equality of intelligence. This power binds individuals together to the very extent that it keeps them apart from each other, able to weave with the same power their own way' (Rancière, 2004, p. 274).

In terms of theatre he questions the necessity of breaking the proscenium arch to effect some form of collectivity and interaction, or to correct the passive role of the audience. Their individuality, he argues, is also what joins them, and this is based on what he describes as the equality of intelligence.

To introduce this concept he returns to some of the ideas contained in an earlier text *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (Rancière, 1991), in which he ruminated on the ideas of the eccentric and little-known professor Joseph Jacotot. In the nineteenth century the professor declared that intellectual emancipation could not be achieved through teaching, maintaining that an ignorant person could teach another ignorant person what he did not know himself. This he called the equality of intelligence. Rancière explains that by this he did not mean the equality of all manifestations of intelligence, but rather equality of intelligence in all its manifestations. In this reckoning, two forms of intelligence cannot be separated or judged comparatively - the pupil is equal in intelligence to the schoolmaster, the genius to the ignorant. The idea interests Rancière on the one hand because it reveals something about learning and on the other because it underlines his thoughts on the emancipated nature of the act of observing. Of the master-student relationship he posits that, 'the master presupposes that what the student learns is the same thing as what he teaches to him... On the contrary, the principle of emancipation is the dissociation of the cause and the effect' (Rancière, 2004, p 276).

What is most helpful in Rancière's theorising about the pupil (which he transfers to the spectator) is the persuasive supposition that what we learn is not identical to what we are taught and more specifically that traditionally the schoolmaster makes the mistake of believing otherwise. If we replace the figure of the schoolmaster with that of the curator here, it gives us a tool for reassessing the exaggerated focus on curatorial knowledge in the early twentieth century. The mistake has been to believe that the more a curator knows the more the public can come to know, or that the exhibition is a site of transfer of such knowledge from one head to another. Both Rancière and Rogoff point us in another direction, in which we are asked to recognise that the presence of the curator is key but that knowledge production occurs at a tangent to their points of view, and furthermore one in which the curators attempts to make things mean or lead audiences to knowledge may have precisely the opposite effect.

3.1.3 Reimagining the public – a different kind of production

As we observe exhibitions and their publics coming into critical focus in recent discussions and publications, *Art and its Institutions*, a collection of essays edited by Nina Möntmann and published in 2006 can be seen as a good marker for this shift from one focus to another, and an indicator of why this has happened. The book's thesis is allied to the discourse of the early 2000s focusing on current institutional conditions and the role of the institution within artistic processes. Yet in the process of discussing late capitalist enterprise culture and its effects upon the museums it also recognises and reflects how important rethinking audiences suddenly appears within this debate.

'Criticism of this form of globalised corporatist institutionalism, with its public conceived as consumers, is starting to be formulated: since the mid 1990s, the programmes devised by progressive art galleries, art associations and other contemporary art institutions often mention the need to 'produce' new publics,

a counter-thesis to the familiar old concept of ‘reaching out for audiences’. A key feature of new concepts for progressive institutions is a radically different perception of public quality and the structure of public spaces’ (Möntmann, 2006, p. 10).

Möntmann’s commentary suggests how curatorial discourse in the mid 2000s started to pay attention to a number of ideas developed over the previous ten years; that against the backdrop of the changes in relationships between institutions, curators and artists, respective relationships to the very idea of *the public* have also changed. By referring to ‘the perception of public quality and the structure of public spaces’ in her introduction to these changes she uses an interesting turn of phrase. Here she prefers to use public as an adjective than to use the term as a noun: the public. The latter, familiar use of the term is thereby questioned and with it the idea of the usefulness of thinking about the public as a definable group or target audience. Instead we are asked to think of what quality, of experience, might be considered public, how we perceive what we might call *publicness* and how this relates to the use of space, a rumination clearly in keeping with Rogoff’s line of enquiry. In the anthology, *Art and its Institutions*, the curator and academic Simon Sheikh further explores this topic in his article *The Trouble with Institutions or, Art and its Publics* (Sheikh, 2006). He draws attention to the fact that the many announcements of crises related to the discussion about institutional change appears, due to its introspective nature, to have excluded important debates about the external representational character of institutions.

“The questioning of the role and function of the institution is not only internal, but also external, and certainly not limited to the art institution. In our modular societies, with their compartmentalisations and specialisations, all institutions are questionable if not downright suspect, while at the same time they are simultaneously expected to deliver, to be functional. They are no longer taken for granted, however and their public and political role is not just questionable, but constantly being

questioned, not least by politicians and funding bodies. So art institutions are not just performing an auto-critique for themselves, the artists and the state of art, but also for the art of the state... the institution is not only the meeting place for art and its public, but also always already at the intersection between art and politics, art and economics, art and society' (Sheikh, 2006, pp. 143-144).

With reference to institutionally critical art practices, Sheikh observes that the institutional discourse about role and function has become internalised, constituting a form of auto-critique. He argues that this critique has broader repercussions than institutions may suppose as the institution comes to represent a site of specific political, economic and social connotations and possibilities. He then goes on to make a connection between this necessary representational role that the institution, when under scrutiny, undertakes and the idea of how a public sphere is produced.

'Such questions of representation are crucial to contemporary art institutions since art institutions are indeed the in-between, the mediator, interlocutor, translator and meeting place for art production and the conception of its 'public'. I deliberately use the term 'public' here without qualifying (or quantifying) it, since it is exactly the definition and constitution of the 'public' as audience, community, constituency or potentiality that should be the task of the art institution: a place that is always becoming a place, a public sphere' (Sheikh, 2006, p. 144).

In this statement Sheikh references two of the key ideas central to a series of short texts and talks he published and delivered in the preceding years, notably, *Public spheres and the Functions of Progressive Art Institutions* (Sheikh, 2004). The first of these is that the relationship between an institution and its public has been misunderstood. His argument suggests that common institutional practice is still constructed around outmoded

ideas that the public is still quantifiable, passive and latent, that the bourgeois subject is still something to be formed, and that the public sphere is singular and uniform. Sheikh argues that the institution now produces the conception of its public in other less directly normative ways, that the public is active within these processes as the institution becomes a meeting place for the pursuit of specific forms of publicness. Reminiscent of Rogoff's 'implicated', there is also a connection to the Foucauldian references adopted by Tony Bennett in his analysis of the nineteenth century museum, *The Birth of the Museum* (Bennett, 1995). Sheikh adopts a similar view of the history of the exhibition being tied to disciplinary models, in which publics were systematically drilled in specific critical, rational and formal values - referring to this as the enlightenment model. In building an argument for the reassessment of the public role of exhibitions he describes a model change in which the values of today's culture industry replace those of former class-bound bourgeois structures - the introduction of the entertainment model as the new exhibitionary complex.

'For the culture industry, the notion of 'the public' with its contingent modes of access and articulation, is replaced by the notion of 'the market', implying commodity-exchange and consumption as modes of access and interaction. This also means that the notion of enlightenment, rational-critical subjects, and a disciplinary social order is replaced by the notion of entertainment as communication, as the mechanism of social control and producer of subjectivity. One mode of address and mechanism of control is, quite simply, replacing the other' (Sheikh, 2006, p. 148).

It is clear that in identifying both models as predominantly built as control mechanisms Sheikh sees similarities between them, and supports an ongoing critique of institutional behaviour as controlling rather than emancipating. This completes the first key point of Sheikh's argument - that the entertainment model can be seen to function in different ways to its

predecessor and that, though institutions and their publics are now in a new relationship, this is not necessarily more culturally progressive or per se more democratic than before.

3.1.4 Counterpublics – exhibition as a space of negotiating publicness.

The second of the key points in Sheikh's argumentation is closely related to the first, but grows out of his exploration of what space for critical activity exists within this new relationship between the institution and the publics that define it. Observing the production of conceptions of the public as a central task of the institution he also argues how this live process of constituting 'a place that is always becoming a place, a public sphere', reflects the possibility for new kinds of publicness to demand in turn new institutional structures. This is the very 'potentiality' he refers to in the above citation, one of the opening up of space for new kinds of self-representation at odds to the bourgeois models of the past. In his argument that such a possibility might exist he supports the critique of Jürgen Habermas's concept of a unified public sphere formed simultaneously by multiple subjects (Habermas, 1989). Instead he explores the potential of the idea of multiple, fragmented public spheres that are contingent on experience and conditioned by various conflicts between the bourgeois ideals of the past and the consumerist reality of the present (here Sheikh notes his debt to the ideas of Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge (Negt & Kluge, 1993)). For the roving subjects of the fragmented antagonistic spheres Sheikh describes, he borrows the term 'counterpublics' from Michael Warner (Warner, 2002).

Warner's term is not as dramatic as it sounds, and he clearly defines that counterpublics should not be seen as oppositional to what we could call normative publics, so much as relational to them. According to Warner, counterpublics share many of the same characteristics as normative publics, in that they are imaginary spaces of address, which are manifested as social spaces. Counterpublics and normative publics alike are the product of the reflexive circulation of discourse. Reflexivity is key to Warner's

understanding of how all publics work, and it refers here to his conviction that publics are produced by ongoing communication with one another based on a mutual negotiation of particular values. These are rehearsed through particular modes of address between strangers that proscribe particular expressive and behavioural possibilities for the ensuing interaction, which in turn become characteristic of the public or counterpublic they produce. Looking predominantly at the behaviour of counterpublics within gay and lesbian culture, Warner argues that while similar in characteristics they represent a reversal or mirroring of the protocols and conditions that define normative publics. They are contingent structures rather than conditional; they evolve specifically through practice and in relation to context rather than existent as a generalising value structure.

‘Counterpublics are counter (only) to the extent that they try to supply different ways of imagining stranger sociability and its reflexivity; as publics, they remain oriented to stranger circulation in a way that is not just strategic but constitutive of membership and its affects’ (Warner, 2002, p. 121-122).

Warner also stresses that these membership structures are in a continual state of negotiation and renegotiation, so counterpublics are always in the process of being *formed* and, in terms of what Warner sees as expressive and behavioural characteristics, being *per-formed*.

The writing of the artist, curator and theorist Marion Von Osten is of particular interest at this point in this study, as she complicates the crises in curating looked at in the earlier chapters, by introducing the question of how contemporary institutions and the curators who work there are now dealing with fields of production that developed parallel to their traditional area of influence - social histories that operated from structures outside the institution’s control mechanisms. Here, she refers to Western social movements since the 1970s predominantly involved in self-organised and collaborative activity and alternative practices from the global East and South

that have until recently escaped the institutional frame. Like Sheikh, she looks to Michael Warner's theory of counterpublics to help her face the question of how she can work as a curator, and also uses his ideas to clarify how, in hindsight, we can see these social movements and excluded communities functioning in the field of contemporary art. For Von Osten there is no question that exhibitions, and the institutions which stage them, act as specific social sites. She maintains that the public is created by context, by the practice of exhibiting and therefore by the curatorial decisions involved in an exhibition, but simultaneously recognises the critical ambivalence of such a concept. What interests her is the question of what this might mean, who might constitute such publics and in what terms they might act as counterpublics in Warner's sense.

'For me a culture producer who represents an approach in which curatorial action was developed as a critical artistic practice in order to challenge the institution's division of labour and power of division, the questions that arise in this context are manifold... By examining the relationship between public and counterpublic I would moreover like to initiate a debate which reacts reflexively to exhibition practices as forms of 'publicisation' and asks to what extent curatorial concepts, in dialogue with other cultural players, are capable of really generating diversified and contextual publics. In other words, publics which no longer meet the expectations of the abstract idea of the bourgeois public' (Von Osten, 2008, p. 232-233).

In her application of Warner's ideas to history she refers to the 'project exhibitions' of the mid to late 1980s and further back to the activities of feminist artist groups in the 1960s and 1970s. She considers the examples of the Woman's House or the A.I.R Gallery in New York as exemplary social spaces active outside the established art system, partially as a result of a gender-based exclusion from the institutions and partially as a conscious reaction to the feeling that these structures were *per se* patriarchal and that

alternatives needed to be established. Like feminist discourse itself, practices which initially focussed on women-related subjects evolved and started to include broader political and social issues, while maintaining the qualities of an informal network interested in the collective and embodied development of knowledge. These qualities, Von Osten argues, informed the development of what she terms the project-exhibition, as an example of which she provides *If You Lived Here* by Martha Rosler at the Dia Arts Foundation in New York in 1989. In her point of view the most significant aspects of exhibitions like these were:

‘The opening up of the art space for a non-art public, the collective production of new knowledge spaces, the self assertion of social groups as opposed to their representation in a product, the use of the art space for theme related discussions, and the establishment of transdisciplinary networks which could be active and productive in other areas of society as well, beyond the pure exhibition context’ (2008, p. 239).

What the project exhibition realises is an important shift in the institution-public relationship. Here, the conscious opening up of the art space for debates, groups and themes that had previously had no access is initiated from without and eventually the value of this activity, as a project, leaves the space for the broader social context from which it came. The aim is not to inform the new audiences through access to an art project, instead the project becomes the object, the aim is to exhibit precisely ‘the relationship between public and private, between depiction and representability’ (2008, p. 239).

In the above discussion of ideas surrounding counterpublics, Sheikh’s observations are key as he correctly identifies the representational function of the institution as central to its ongoing importance not only within art, but also within culture as a whole. The institution not only represents *something* but also *someone*, and where debates about roles within art production and mediation traditionally see the institution as representing the *things* (art),

Sheikh explores how attention to the *ones* (publics) represented, suggest an intrinsic politics to every act of exhibition. Shifts in the political conditions within which institutions operate may have simply replaced one control mechanism with another - we might agree that meeting places that are produced for the new variegated sub-cultures may simply resemble the shopping mall with its range of consumer offers. But to indulge in such cultural nihilism is only possible if we overlook the fact that regardless of its common face, something profound has happened to the conception of the public sphere and with it the potential of the institution. Fragmentation has not only been accompanied by the emergence of new markets, but also by 'the unhinging of stable categories and subject positions' (Sheikh, 2006, p. 149) so important to the long held conceptions of a *general public*.

If we connect this thinking to a reflection on the art world as a particular public sphere and the position of the curator within it, we can like Von Osten consider the potential of the exhibition as a site for the formation of counterpublics. The identifying of exhibition as such a site would denote not only as Rogoff argues an informal and momentary formation of community, but also in Warner's terms, the repeated negotiation and renegotiation of the terms of such a group's sociability. Of great importance here is that we question our understanding of the nature of this public sphere which we call the art world. That sphere to which we as academics, curators, artists, dealers, collectors, art lovers, critics etc. belong is defined not only by production but also by reception and most importantly by the discourse which informs both of these actions. If we look to Warner we can see how the art world has precisely these circles of the self-initiated, reflexive and performed membership he prescribes to a public. The us and them/producer-consumer relationship, where the art world caters for some unknown, generalised other (the public) has long been understood as inadequate, but in the absence of alternatives there is still a sense that institutions imagine their target audience as a proportion of a bourgeois normative whole, and one which they wish to forever expand. There is a real question whether the public for art is in effect interested in mirroring modalities common to the

normative public model. But, there can be no question that the challenges for the exhibition become far more interesting if we see public as different to populace, move away from the agenda of justifying the payment of taxes, and set about asking ourselves the question Marion Von Osten sets herself – can exhibition making constitute a counterpublic strategy?

Warner's evocation of counterpublics is primarily coupled with his interest in the nature of the sociability and reflexivity in such groups, but his idea also denotes a specific approach to the way knowledge is developed within such groups. Rancière's reflections on the master pupil relationship remind us that learning is traditionally understood as an individual process, an activity separate from other things we do and a form of acquisition, in which knowledge (out there) is transferred (to in here). If we trace back this traditional understanding we can see how educational reformers throughout the first half of the twentieth century (In particular John Dewey, Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky) sought to propagate understandings of learning that accommodated the subjectivity of knowledge and the importance of interaction with a person's context. However the focus on the individual mind and the process of understanding through acquisition remained central to these developments. The behaviour of visitors to exhibitions might seem to underscore these notions of understanding, as do many mission statements of the institutions that stage them. The solitary visitor with their hands knotted behind their back and a look of concentration on their face may find solace in the large information panels that hang at the exhibition's entrance, explaining how they should make sense of what is on display and affording them understanding.

However, the question of what it really is they understand remains pertinent. Since the 1980s considerable attention has been given to specific developments in the understanding of social models of learning, and this area of research provides us with a very different picture of what might actually be taking place in exhibitions. The proponents of this field note that there cannot be social learning without behavioural and cognitive aspects, but they

are also clear that such aspects alone ignore an extremely important aspect of how we gather and adapt our knowledge. By relocating the act of learning from the mind of the individual to the social relationship, and specifically to the act of co-participation, these theorists tie it to the issues of community and identity. Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger maintain that we learn continually from our engagement with everyday life and we do so in relation to one or more 'communities of practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1991 & Wenger, 1999). They define this as simply a group of people joined by a common concern or interest who, through interaction of various kinds, learn with and from one another. Key to the understanding of such communities is the way in which they are joined to one another and for Lave and Wenger this rests in the idea of practice. Practice is understood as being the way that the meaning of learning is configured, through the process of participation with a community of other practitioners. Important in their analysis is a specific requalification of community, in which practice may bind people who do not necessarily see themselves as members of a group, and in which individuals can be legitimately attached to communities of practice but remain peripheral. It is arguable that this constellation is common in the field of the arts. Importantly in regard to those who practice exhibitions, seen in this way, learning is necessarily understood as both a performative and relational process. It is performative in the sense that situated learning denies the existence of general knowledge, suggesting that meaning rests only in that which we practice with others, as such learning is also about the process of continually renewing sets of relations within such communities.

This extension of context with a focus on the social - specifically on community - recasts the aforementioned solitary visitor as a participant in a quite different learning process. The look of concentration is not one of struggling to acquire knowledge, but one of interpreting their own place in relation to the work they are observing, to the person who created it, exhibited it and chose to write about it and most importantly to a community of others doing similar things. They may be a supporter of the institution, an occasional visitor, or just someone escaping from the rain, perhaps they are

the artist, the curator, or the writer of the text hung in the exhibition's entrance. Whoever they are, and however peripheral we choose to see their participation, they are at that moment part of a community of practice.

Although it is necessary to observe the circularity that suggests the art world as a specific public sphere, it would be wrong to consider it as unitary. In fact, evidence points to a fragmented and often conflicted sphere where different ideas and power blocks fight for validity and authority - 'a platform for different and oppositionary subjectivities' (Sheikh, 2006, p. 149); an intertwined but variegated network of 'ongoing spaces of encounter' (Warner, 2002, p. 90); a mesh of interlinking and overlapping communities of practice.

3.2 Reimagining the art world – from paradigm to rhizome

Taking into consideration the analysis of previous sections of this study we can now assess what implications these have on our understanding of exhibitions. In advance of the coming chapter, in which the questions raised in the study so far will be applied to three exhibition case studies, two tasks are at hand. Firstly, in regard to the crises discussed in Chapter 2 and the recognition that these stem from a tension between conflicting understandings of how labour is divided in the field of contemporary art, it is necessary to look at models of practice, to consider what relations are described in these conflicts and specifically to question what position curators and exhibitions have within such models. Secondly, with regard to the case studies, a tool is required with which we can approach the analysis of curatorial projects - a series of key questions and terms which can guide the research. The remodelling of practice is a necessary part of informing this second step, describing within which context the analysis is considered of use.

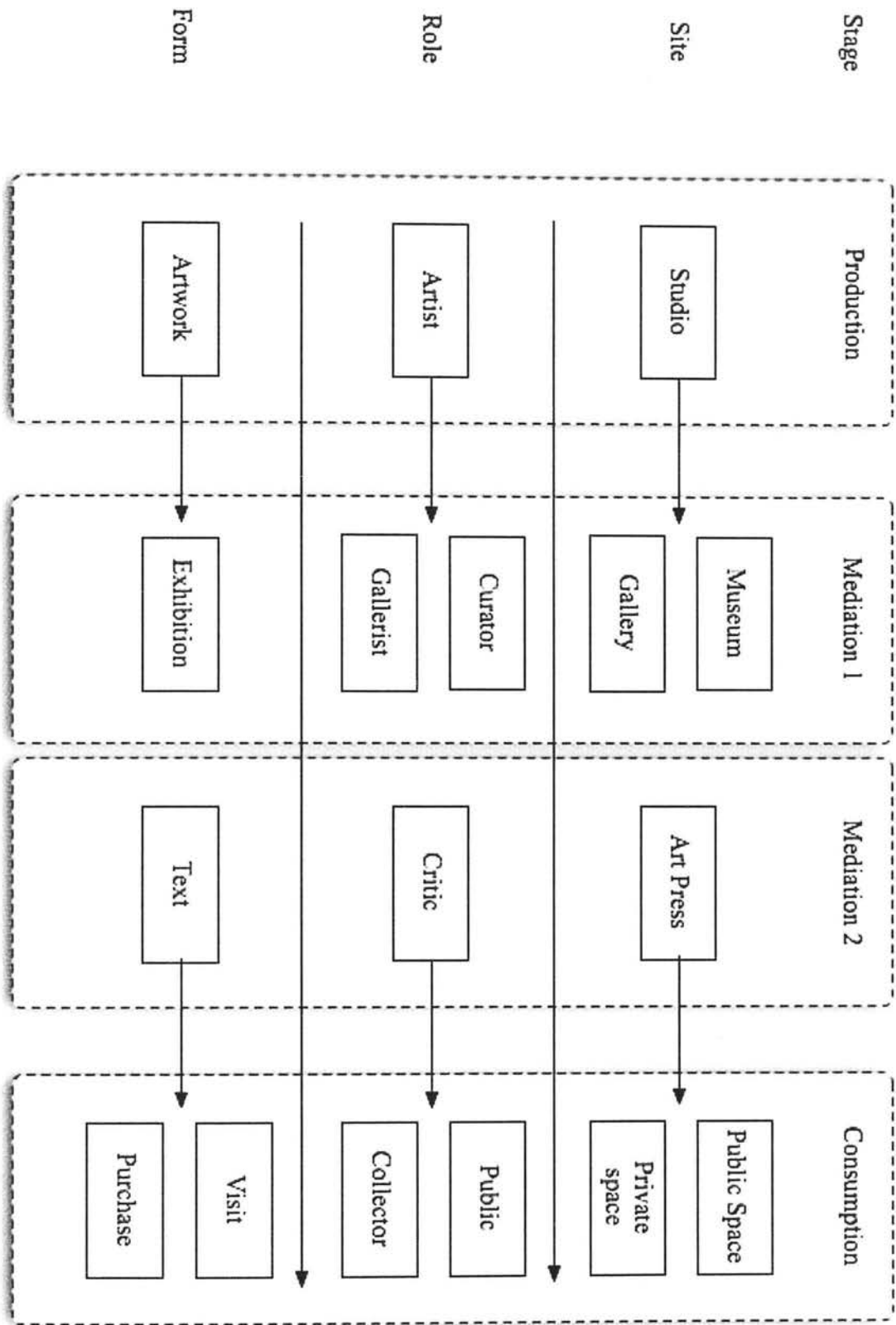
3.2.1 The art world as paradigm

Looking back to the references in this study so far, in 1992 John Miller argued for the need for self-reflexivity in the art world and with it the recognition that all players within it are functionaries of a system that follows no natural logics, but rather is formed and reformed by the nature of our continued cooperation (Miller, 1992). His statement, and particularly the way he imagines a system with functionaries, serves as a good invitation here to visualise a model of this system; a perceived field of forms, roles and sites. His statement draws attention to the fact that natural relations are perceived as existent, witnessing the power of received ideas about how things are done. As the role of the curator professionalises it does so against the backdrop of an imagined order of relations, within a system of perceived hierarchies and in keeping with a specific tempo of production - a blueprint for who has the authority to do what and when. The first two chapters looked closely at the power of this imaginary paradigmatic set of relations. When Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev's professes distrust of excessive elements within curating, she accompanies this with a call for a reinvestigation of traditional curatorial practices (Christov-Bakargiev & Gillick, 2001). A model of what this might be appears before our eyes - excessive practice on a trajectory away from traditional practice, crossing dotted lines, expanding on a page. When Lawrence Alloway proposes that the curatorial dim-out he perceives occurring in America's museums can only be dealt with by establishing and policing a code of conduct (Alloway, 1996), he conjures up a model of the ways things should be. Here we find distinct fields of activity outlined for the artists, the dealers and the curators, preserved in a stable and respectful relation to one another.

Alternatively, Rebecca Gordon Nesbitt's suggests that we see the art world as a microcosm of the current world order, one in which the institution is comparable to the multinational corporation and the artists comparable to their exploited workers (Gordon Nesbitt, 2003), drawing a diagram of a radical inequality between the represented and the representer, based on an

uneven concentration of power. Mark Hutchinson's feelings are similar, and his polemic about the 'New Curation' describes a similarly extreme situation of disempowerment, where artistic production and institutionalised mediation should, for the sake of art, be kept separate. Again models of relations emerge from their examples where we can observe the institutional function spreading to usurp other, previously distinct and autonomous functions, structures realigning for top-down power, the producers defending their identification as artists and fighting for control of their terms of agency. In these examples of individuals taking stock of what is going on in the field of curating, we can identify, albeit roughly, the presence of an enduring paradigm of how labour in the art world has traditionally been understood. Modelling this paradigm is interesting because it establishes where particular boundaries are perceived as existing. In relation to the points of crisis discussed earlier, the model can illustrate where these points are, who patrols them and on what terms.

Fig1 - Paradigmatic model of the field of contemporary art



The paradigmatic model of the field of contemporary art (Fig. 1, p. 92) is a representation developed to illustrate of this relationship and it attempts to map several interrelated factors in a presumed sequence or series of stages. The model is not an innovation but rather an adapted version of those proposed by other authors in recent years, including Morris, Hargreaves and McIntyres' Art Eco-system model, (Morris Hargreaves & Macintyre, 2004), featured in their research for the Arts Council of England, and Hans Christian Dany's agency model which he uses to illustrate his article *You Can Call It Luxury* (Dany, 2001, p. 49), discussed below. Sequence is of importance in all three models because traditionally the field of contemporary art is talked about in terms of consequential stages of production, mediation and consumption; the suggested process is one unfolding in a specific and quantifiable envelope of time. The first stage, production, denotes the making of art objects or artworks, an activity carried out by the artist in their studio or an approximation of this individualised working space. The isolation of this stage in the diagram, and its situation at the *beginning of things* stands in for the concept of creative primacy, the dotted line around it a marker of its supposed impregnability. The stages of mediation that follow are described here as secondary and tertiary to this primary act of creation, and traditionally held as separate, and of lesser creative value - sites of second order creativity. Here we find the exhibition, its organisers; the curator or gallerist and its sites; the museum or the gallery. There is a sense also that this stage is independent of that which follows it, its focus being on the objective presentation of what has been produced, namely artworks selected from the studio. The second stage of mediation sees the arrival of text, its key actor is the critic and its allotted site is the art-press. This activity is focussed on the subjective qualification of firstly the artworks and secondly, but less importantly, on how they have been shown in exhibition. The final stage is termed consumption and signals the imagined break with the fields of production and mediation and the arrival of the *other*, those traditionally

understood as outside these professional fields; the public and amongst them the collector. Their activity is to visit the public spaces of the museum or art gallery or to extend this, through purchase, into the private spaces of their homes or collections.

In this study the model serves the purpose of introducing another comparative model and as such should be seen as a sketch, a provocation and a starting point for questions and discussions. It can only ever serve the function of an imaginary, a wilful attempt to generalise myriad specific references to the traditional relationships in the field of art - presuppositions of fixed hierarchies, sequences, and processes. On closer examination of course it inadequately describes the complexity of the relationships at play in the field of contemporary art and importantly it suggests itself as separate from other cultural fields, asking us to imagine an impossible hermetic field of operations. That said it allows us to see specific boundaries, those placed around art making, those suggestive of an objective field of mediation and those prescribing the public's role as consumer, client or customer. As such it also represents the restrictions of the curator's apportioned role (first level mediation) and acceptance of the status quo. In doing so it shows us how the exhibition inevitably finds itself tied to these restrictions, as a ritualised and conditioned site proposed as the object of curatorial control.

3.2.2 Itinerant identifications.

In the article *You Can Call It Luxury*, Hans Christian Dany seeks to address a very similar question to that raised in this section of the study:

'The question as to whether the professions, role models and division of labour implied by the terms artist, gallery owner, curator, critic, collector and exhibition visitor do not serve primarily to maintain existing dependencies and block new possibilities' (Dany, 2001, p. 49).

For him it is clear that within the new economy dissecting old codes and inventing new ones is less attractive than knowing when to master the ones that exist and slip effortlessly between them at opportune moments. As an artist who occasionally curates projects and frequently publishes criticism, Dany sees himself as a representative example of the self-exploiting cultural producer, who nevertheless enjoys the luxury of multi-tasking within the deregulated field. For example and by way of clarification he describes his own interest in crossing traditional boundaries between the artist and the critic. He counters the critique that such a double role represents an attempt to design a super-subject with absolute control and rather sees it as the dissolution of the very idea of singular subjectivity - a process that he proposes does not mean the selling out of art, but rather the strengthening of artistic thought. He describes his own trajectory across various roles evident in the art world, from producer of raw material through artistic activities, curatorial moments, critical activity, visiting exhibitions and ending up back where he started. This is a playful but serious reflection on the itinerancy of his identity in relation to a model of professional roles. The luxury about which he writes, he terms deprofessionalisation, a practice he selects for its qualities as 'self-determined work on the margin of a dictate of the economy' (Dany, 2001, p. 51).

Dany's description of his activities bears similarities to the squatting tactics of Ute Meta Bauer, albeit exhibiting a less aggressive more opportunistic approach. Looking at our model we can see how her career also traverses these sites of activity, taking the attributes of specific roles with her and testing their effectiveness in other areas. With her merging of *we, the producers* with *we, the institution* she purposefully breaks through one of the boundaries here, proposing for a moment before eviction the possibility of moving self-determined work to the centre of the dictate of the economy and letting its critical unsuitability work for her there. Maria Lind's decision to select a group of artists as *sputniks*, from the Russian for *travelling companions*, for her programme at the Kunstverein in München can also be seen as an act of transgressing these imagined boundaries between art

making and art mediation. The artists co-designed the program, invited other artists, commissioned publications and even suggested training for the gallery team. As the institution opened up its concerns as a site of mediation to the co-productive practices of the sputniks, the art shown and the politics of showing become one. The public is confronted with mediation as production and vice versa, as these categories effectively dissolve (Grammel & Lind, 2002). Liam Gillick, incidentally one of the Sputniks involved in Munich, professes his belief that the rise in interest in curating is accompanying the dereliction of criticality in art criticism (Christov-Bakargiev & Gillick, 2001). The exhibition and the curatorial processes it has come to display start to be read as meta-artworks and as meta-critique as if the two activities traditionally held as parallel and distinct to that of the curator, the artist on the one side and the critic on the other, have started to fold inwards into the one position - the by now indistinct, difficult to characterise concept of the curator. In this eventuality, and in the light of how common itinerant identification has become in the field we have to distinguish between the idea that the curator is a person who has assumed some misplaced importance and started making art and writing criticism, and the truer picture that the curator is a professional designation and as such a place-holder; that curating is a site traversed by numerous, various itinerant figures from within the field of art and from without.

The paradigmatic model's inability to accommodate complexity, movement and multiplicity represent the boundaries of its use. How can we talk of a unified concept of production at a time where the term contemporary art brings such diverse forms and strategies as conceptual art and abstract painting under one umbrella, or of mediation in a world where some art institutions operate without a collection and others without a building, and where curatorial programs include taught modules on management on the one hand and activism on the other? The idea of that there might still be an argument for a return to fixed roles and adherence to traditional norms appears outdated, or at least unrepresentative, and certainly unenforceable. Nowadays artistic installations encompass exhibition spaces, curatorial-

artworks physically support other art works, museums program exhibitions of motorbikes, product design and fashion (sponsored by manufacturers, design retailers and fashion houses), artist-architects re-design institutional spaces as social lounges and exhibitions find themselves distributed throughout the public space or dispersed in the ether of the Internet. In the light of this, the premise of a rigid relationship between institution, curator, and artist appears to dissolve, and with it the suggestion that the public point of entry is *per se* after the fact. Regardless of the wish to imagine separate roles for the sake of either preserving the idea of artistic autonomy, defending the image of institutional objectivity, or conserving a divide between the producers and the publics they produce, a look at practice would suggest that this separation is only possible theoretically. Diversity of approach, inter-disciplinarity and collaboration serve to confuse radically any simple understanding of the relationship between once clearly constructed positions.

3.2.3 Complicating the role of hierarchy

In Hans Christian Dany's description of his own practice he traverses the hierarchies of the art world, at times playing the professional or the authority and at others the dilettante or amateur. For him this journey facilitates not only a precarious financial economy during the moments of authority, but also provides him with another luxury, that of being outside the professional system when he chooses to be. This is not to be confused with the work-play dichotomy however, because the roles of inside and outside remain, in his story, within the world of work. Those low down in the professional hierarchies of the art world are not suitably financially rewarded, if they are paid at all. This is an important reflection on the dichotomy of any understanding of agency and value in this field, concepts that are at once culturally and economically defined and therefore understood in terms of both financial and social capital. Just as the role relations detailed in the model are confused by itinerant identifications and the stages made indistinct by the merging of roles, sites and forms into one another, the idea of a singular established hierarchy in the field becomes problematic. The

term and the suppositions that accompany it are misleading in this context as is revealed in the attention to examples. Taking Gordon Nesbitt's generalisation about the institution as multinational and the artist as exploited worker, we can imagine a quite different constellation. When a modestly sized institution seeks to commission a world-renowned artist for a new project, which will bring high visibility to their endeavours, the artist agrees, but their demands require extra fundraising for their fees and the engagement of volunteers for the realisation of the project. In this case a different hierarchy is enacted, with the artists at the top and unpaid institutional workers at the bottom. Taking Dany's proposal of luxury to complicate this further, we can imagine that the unpaid volunteer of our example is actually working part-time as a financial consultant and earns more in this capacity than the institution's director. The volunteer sees the project as valuable unpaid work nevertheless, because they do not wish to see themselves as limited to one role in life. This is not to say that Gordon Nesbitt's proposition is incorrect, but to address the relativity with which all general statements regarding roles and positioning in the field of art must be understood.

In respect to this, in rethinking the model it is necessary to complicate the idea of hierarchy and describe the prevalent situation in the field of art in terms of a multiplicity and simultaneity of relations. This is not to suggest that hierarchies do not exist in the art world, as they clearly do, nor that what is being discussed here is whether the art world could function as a non-hierarchical space, for that is not the point of interest. Accepting the multiplicity and simultaneity of relations, encompasses the idea of hierarchy but denotes both its plurality and instability within the given field. We can identify that by suggesting standard relations between roles, apportioned to specific sites and stages of a normalised process the paradigmatic model also imagines fixed hierarchies based on these. A more complex understanding undermines this fixedness, describing power relations of different kinds as present but open to constant renegotiation by the parties involved. Put simply, hierarchies should be understood as plural and inequalities of power

as innate, but relative. In contrast to the state of affairs suggested by the paradigmatic model, when we look closely, we find the existence of several, perhaps contradictory, hierarchies being played out within particular projects or institutions at any given time.

There are parallels between these observations and those made in recent years by social theorists and anthropologists, exploring habitual attitudes to the idea of the 'social' in the social sciences. Actor-network theory emerged as part of an attempt to redefine the idea of social relations as both material and semiotic. This understanding of social networks as constituted by the interaction of not only people, but also things and ideas clearly contradicted conventional social theory, which maintains that the subject of social agency is exclusively human. Similarly, in addressing the paradigmatic model of art production we have to begin by abandoning our habit of differentiating the nature of roles, sites and forms. Here we do this by paying new attention to the exhibition, as a form capable of uniting these multifarious constituents. The approach to networks described in Actor Network Theory, like that to publics taken by Michael Warner (2002), is to see them in a continual state of reconstitution and as a result essentially performative in character (Latour, 2005). Amongst those applying Actor Network Theory to exhibition-making are the aforementioned sociologist Bruno Latour, who developed the theory alongside Michael Callon and John Law, and has co-curated exhibitions at the ZKM in Karlsruhe. Latour's ideas are also influential on the ideas of social anthropologist Sharon Macdonald who has, in recent texts, explored the possibility of the exhibition as 'assemblage' (Basu & Macdonald, 2007).

3.2.4 The art world as rhizome

With the introduction of the idea of itinerancy of practice and the recognition that modelling roles, sites and forms in a paradigmatic way excludes the complexities of hierarchy, we may be tempted to look around us for an alternative; a new paradigm better suited to understanding relations in the expanded field of art production. However, if we reappraise Hans Christian

Dany's nomadic practice and imagine how it would look if all other functions, sites and forms in the model were similarly on the move, it soon becomes apparent that part of the problem here lies in the act of modelling itself. Indeed it is not only the predominant understanding of these relations that is inflexible and therefore prohibitive, but the system of knowledge that underlies this attempt at order. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari begin the introduction to their book *A Thousand Plateaus, Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), entitled *Rhizome*, with a critical look at systems of thought and how thought has been traditionally ordered. Situating the book at the centre of this history, they describe its past and with it the history of knowledge.

'A first type of book is the root-book. The tree is already the image of the world, or the root the image of the world-tree. This is the classical book, as noble, signifying, and subjective organic interiority (the strata of the book). The book imitates the world, as art imitates nature: by procedures specific to it that accomplish what nature cannot or can no longer do. The law of the book is the law of reflection, the one that becomes two. How could the law of the book reside in nature, when it is what presides over the very division between world and book, nature and art? One becomes two: whenever we encounter this formula, even stated strategically by Mao or understood in the most 'dialectical' way possible, what we have before us is the most classical and well reflected, oldest, and weariest kind of thought' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 16).

The root or tree, with the clear form of the singular trunk or main root giving way to the branches or shoots, is upheld in their writing as the symbol associated with the classical tradition of unity, where a binary logic informs all structure; as one becomes two, two becomes four and so on. The book therefore is a picture of the world, its logic always tied to that of reflection, from the one to the two. The paradigmatic model, our picture of the (art) world describes precisely such a treelike structure, where the one artist (the

trunk or main root), gives way to the few mediators (main branches or shoots) and finally the many consumers (smaller more numerous sub-branches and shoots). This is the process we have come to understand as the linear dissemination of knowledge. As such it should be understood as a classical construction and, Deleuze and Guattari argue, a weary one on account of its failure to accommodate the natural. In particular this is because the binary system can never genuinely perceive multiplicity, satisfying itself with imitations of this in the forms of regenerations, reproductions and returns.

With its proposition of a singular starting point for all things, the One, tree or root systems are necessarily defined by concepts of hierarchy, centrality and unity.

‘Arborescent systems are hierarchical systems with centres of significance and subjectification, central automata like memories. In the corresponding models, an element only receives information from a higher unit, and only receives a subjective affection along pre-established paths. This is evident in current problems in information science and computer science, which still cling to the oldest modes of thought in that they grant all power to a memory or central organ’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 18).

In this study we can add the art world to that list of areas that still cling to old modes of thought and the crisis in curating to the problems these have brought about. We can recognise its trappings in the concentration of power in the few (the select group of successful artists) and the central (the institutions). In contrast to the logics of the tree/root Deleuze and Guattari introduce the rhizome. A rhizome is a root system found in particular plants, particularly bulbs and tubers, which takes on a quite different structure to that of a tree, a community of plants producing a lateral network of shared roots which joins them all and enables the ongoing expansion of the community. The two authors establish its key qualities as connection,

heterogeneity, multiplicity, asignifying rupture, cartography and decalcomania. In our attempt to question a paradigmatic understanding of the art world several of these rhizomatic parameters are particularly useful, serving to further accentuate particular observations. Given that a rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections, we need to understand these as potentially more important than the things (roles, sites, forms) they connect. As Deleuze and Guattari point out: 'there are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as found in a structure, tree or root. There are only lines' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 8).

The mesh of ever extending and connecting lines is suggestive of process and movement, at once performative and non-unitary in nature. The defining character that separates a multiple (from one to two) from multiplicity is that very absence of the possibility of the unitary within the multiplicity, the negation not only of the division of subject and object, but of their existence. Instead we have connections, lines and ruptures. The idea of the asignifying rupture describes the behaviour of rhizomatic root systems when someone passes a spade through them or a section of their community are starved of light by a fallen tree. When damaged in one place the rhizome simply starts up again one of its old lines, or creates a new one. Rhizomatic systems importantly accommodate rupture in a way tree or root systems cannot, and they benefit from this.

Can we imagine what our paradigmatic model might look like if rethought as a rhizome? No. The impossibility of this task shows us both how radical Deleuze and Guattari's proposition is and how dominant the classical tree/root understanding of the art world has become. Like many other institutional structures both public and private, the state-run art institutions appear bound to the tree/root logic - centralised structures, directors and curators organised in a top down fashion, large immobile buildings, with inflexible spaces habitually unable to accommodate rupture. Thinking of Hans Christian Dany, we might perhaps see the artist as a counter to this, but only of course if they are willing, as he claims, to consider abandoning the

traditionally held subjective singularity of the claim 'I am an artist'. The argument goes that without artists there would be no museums, and any critic of the tree/root-like structures we have noted in the classical institutions must now realise that what was perhaps intended as an emancipatory statement is also one that denotes complicity. In the Western context, the artist and the art work, with their historically constructed validation through ideas of originality and genius, are inseparable from the bourgeois art institutions terms for the production of its enlightened and entertained subjects; without the museums there would be no artists. When framed as a super-subject and focus for all things creative the artist is actually the champion of tree/root thought.

It should not surprise us that the model of the art world as rhizome, is an impossibility, as rhizomatic thought denies the structure a counter-paradigm would require. Deleuze and Guattari point out that 'a rhizome is not amenable to any structural or generative model' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 13), and the exercise is less valuable and more time consuming than looking again at Fig. 1 and imagining everything that it is incapable of representing. The task is one of understanding the activity of the art world as a mesh of connections, lines without points and ruptures. When we think of the art world in rhizomatic terms we start to map our own experiences of it in new ways, and mapping is important here as the rhizome has clear cartographic qualities, resembling a spread out field of lines delineating changing zones and joining imagined spaces.

'The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation. It can be drawn on a wall, conceived of as a work of art, constructed as a political action or as a meditation' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 13-14).

With this in mind, our experiences of what Rogoff terms 'a proliferation of performative acts' become applicable not only to observations of the public but distributed over the whole spectrum of activities in the field. If we pay attention to the connections, lines and ruptures that constitute our experience of participating in the art world, whether we see our role as artist, curator, critic or audience member, we are confronted with the multiplicity of these. Consistent with Rogoff's idea that as a consequence of participation a collectivity arises, which she terms 'the implicated', the rhizome adds to this the suggestion that whether consciously or unconsciously we are all on an itinerant path through different prescribed and self-initiated positions. Given this fact, the exhibition can be seen as a concentration of performative acts in which positions and representations are negotiated, it can be understood as the site for the performance of the public sphere we term the art world and perhaps of counterpublics within this. The exchanges which make up this performance are not limited to the point at which the exhibition is opened to the critics and the public, but begin with the conception of the project and extend to encompass every formal and informal exchange which may make up the after-life of the project. Put another way, exhibitions are not only organised and visited, but they are *constituted* and this process spans the life of a project, is ongoing and by nature heterogeneous and non-aligned.

3.2.5 A new approach to exhibition analysis.

In this chapter we have questioned the paradigmatic ways of thinking about production in the field of contemporary art and established that the exhibition can be understood as a site where differing forms of production are at play. For the artist, production may still, but not necessarily, denote their engagement with image or object, for an institution it may be primarily associated with programming, for a curator invariably with the business of making exhibitions, but for the exhibition, production is associated with publicness - exhibitions produce states of being public. It is only when we assess these forms of production together that we can ascertain what *constitutes* an exhibition, and this is importantly different to establishing

what an exhibition contains or debating what an exhibition means. The term constitution describes simultaneously the act or process of forming or establishing something and the state of the thing being formed or established. As such it is an inclusive term describing the aggregate of all processes and characteristics.

To analyse exhibitions in terms of their *constitution* is to move away from a methodology based on binary parameters, such as the relationship between form and content, between works and space or between themes and practices. Instead we need to analyse the connections, multiplicities and ruptures that the processes of exhibition engender and contain, as these are of primary interest if we wish to assess how knowledge is negotiated through such projects. These may appear to be latent and unrecoverable elements in any process and they are certainly not as simply observed as formal characteristics, but the challenge must be, through a mixture of empirical and theoretical analyses to reach some conclusions about the terms by which exhibitions function in this way. Analysis of this kind is rare in the field of contemporary art, and there is a danger that the engagement with structure required by any analysis might entail recourse to the traditional models we have identified as inadequate. In understanding the art world as in motion, hierarchies as under continual review and reorganisation, and roles as signifiers being traversed by numerous subjects, care has to be taken to avoid atomising this subtle network in the wish to establish specific connections and identify and assign particular activities and strategies.

To begin an analysis of the constitution of exhibition projects we need to interrogate all stages of the process and consider factors that at first may appear marginal. In relation to traditional art criticism this entails not only observing formal factors of the kind that are visible when visiting the finished exhibition - the works, the space, the structures of display - but also considering contextual, process-based and durational factors. The context of the exhibition may well reveal a particular reasoning for its constitution or provide an idea of how it came to produce specific states of *publicness*. To

address context we may have to pose questions about its site; both architectural and geographical, and about the timing of the project, perhaps in relation to other events occurring at the same time. When we talk of analysing process we need to piece together a picture of the nature of the collectivities that were established during the project, the terms of the connections between curators, artists, institutional representatives, funders, members of the public etc. What were the terms of involvement and how were these constructed, opened up or brought to an end? Regarding the duration of the project we need similarly to illuminate connections, in this case over time, to consider what role change or evolution played in the project, to assess points of simultaneity and to establish the relationships between the lengths of display, of participation and of documentation.

As examined in the early stages of this study, traditional criticism of exhibitions has centred on content, and in those cases where curatorial processes has been addressed, on the question of the selection of content and what parameters this has involved. Issues such as the illustration of theme, focus on specific media, aesthetic connections between works, or presentation of artists from a particular social grouping or location are part of this familiar approach to understanding selective strategies in exhibitions. In the analysis suggested here, the notion of the exhibition as formed predominantly by inclusions and exclusions is problematised and relativised. Selective strategies, traditionally understood as the domain of the curator, are understood in respect to experiential, interpretative and performative elements. The experience of participation can be looked at in terms of programmable and un-programmable elements such as the scale of space, the intensity of exchange between participants and the way in which sequences and relations come about in the project. Similarly the interpretation of the project is understood as an area of exchange, in which institutional strategies for *adding meaning* have to be seen in relation to artistic, curatorial and audience-led counter-initiatives, here the rupture between what is said and what is learned become interesting. Finally attention to the performative aspects of exhibition - the live development, negotiation and exchange of

knowledge is key to the analysis embarked upon in the coming chapter. In particular in seeking answers to the questions: what is learned in specific exhibitions and how is this learning collectively embarked upon? What is the balance of power in this negotiation of knowledge and is this open for change? How are publics producing themselves in specific exhibitions and what self-representations emerge? How, and in what relationship to others, do the activities of the curator affect these processes of learning, negotiating and producing?

Chapter 4

Case Studies

4.1 Introduction to the case studies

In this section of the study three exhibition projects are described and analysed:

I am a Curator

5th November – 14th December 2003.

Chisenhale Gallery, London, UK.

A process-based exhibition project by Per Hüttner.

Minority Report: Challenging Intolerance in Contemporary Denmark

25th September – 24th October 2004.

Aarhus Festival of Contemporary Art. Various venues in Aarhus, Denmark.

Co-curated by independent curators Trine Rytter Andersen, Kirsten Dufour, Tone O. Nielsen, and Anja Raithel.

The Maghreb Connection: Movements of Life Across North Africa

11th December 2006 – 13th January 2007. Townhouse Gallery, Cairo, Egypt.

24th February – 22nd April 2007. Centre D'Art Contemporain Geneva, Switzerland.

Curated by Ursula Biemann.

These exhibitions have been selected for four reasons:

Firstly, as relatively recent projects taking place between 2003 and 2007, they maximise the relevance and usefulness of the resultant analysis for practice of the moment. It is recognised that changes in the socio-economic context for curating make the usefulness of any past examples relative, but the choice of recent case studies, separated only by a period five years, is intended to afford space for a comparison of methods which we can ascertain as relevant to early twenty-first century practice.

Secondly, they are broadly speaking European projects, with one exhibition beginning its tour in Cairo. While recognising the dangers of ascertaining origin in a globalised field of production and in relation to projects which involve non-western participants, this claim is made here on the basis of the predominant sites of display, location of organisers, supporters, funders and participants and of the roots of the discourse that informs the projects. The decision to limit the focus geographically to projects initiated from Denmark, the UK and Switzerland, as with the above focus on recent projects, is on the grounds of relevance and usefulness for European practitioners today.

Thirdly, they make explicit claims to address critically a set of socio-political issues (including that represented by the art exhibition itself), and to engage audiences with this knowledge in specific participatory ways, at odds to traditional exhibition formats. The aims of the exhibitions are described clearly in their publicity and interpretation.

Lastly, the exhibitions have all been curated by independent curators or artists with temporary relations to the institutions within which the exhibition projects have taken place. This choice is in keeping with the study's focus on the activity of freelance curators and artist-curators and reflects the interests of the author who is himself a freelance curator.

Though these general similarities between the exhibitions are perceivable and as such helpful, the selection of case studies has also been made with an interest in their diversity. Within the tradition of recent, European, socio-

political art exhibitions the case studies represent a variety of curatorial approaches addressed here in terms of their constitution and the many intertwined strategies that make up that constitution.

The case studies are analysed using the methodology developed in the third chapter of this study and proposed in its final section. The source material for the analysis includes interviews with key participants of the projects (see Appendices 1-7), primary published material to promote, publicise, interpret and document the projects and secondary published material in the form of reviews and articles referencing the projects (see bibliography).

4.2.1 Structuring the Game

The exhibition project *I Am a Curator* took place at the Chisenhale Gallery in East London in November and December of 2003. While resembling an art exhibition and involving the usual protagonists; artists, curators, gallery staff and visitors, it took a different approach to the division of roles and organisation of time commonly associated with such events. Through the application of these changes the project functioned as a complex game, which as the title suggested took the curating of an exhibition as its theme. The game was conceived of and overseen by the artist and curator Per Hüttner, who co-designed it together with various artists, curators, architects and designers who he invited to work with him on the project. Its players were volunteers from the gallery's public and they were assisted in their role by the gallery staff, with exhibition visitors acting as the spectators. Each game lasted precisely one day and over the duration of the project it was played a total of thirty times.

The project was proposed on the invitation of the gallery, who were engaged in commissioning a number of participatory projects focussed on outreach and new audiences at the time. It was described in the gallery press release as an 'experiment in democratising the curatorial process' (Chisenhale Gallery, 2003a) and by Hüttner in retrospect as 'six weeks of intense collaborative experimentation' (Hüttner, 2005, p. 9). The starting point for the project was a simple idea, which in the eyes of its initiator sought to provoke 'discussion about the meaning of artworks, exhibitions and the role of the artist' (Hüttner, 2005, p. 11). This idea was to create an exhibition where the visitors assumed the role of curators. More precisely, interested members of the public were invited to take on the task of selecting from a collection of works stored in the gallery and, over the course of one day, arranging them into an exhibition in the gallery space. In the process roles associated with production and reception were reversed and commonly observed structures

of authorship, power and expertise were temporarily disrupted. Anyone, regardless of their previous curatorial experience, could put themselves forward for the task by booking a slot in advance. Every day, over the six weeks that the project was open to the public, a new volunteer or group of volunteers organised the works in the gallery space according to their wishes and opened their exhibition to the general public. Alongside the team of helpers employed by the gallery to assist the lay-curators, Hüttner was also present as an advisor, his role varying from day to day depending on the requirements of the volunteer. By the end of the project's run over 70 people had participated as 'Curators of the Day'.

Once the institution had accepted his concept, Hüttner chose to progress by addressing the range of practical questions that facilitating the activity raised. To realise this he outsourced particular functional aspects of the project to others who he referred to as his collaborators on the project. The key challenges he addressed in developing an apparatus which would deliver the experience he had in mind were: sourcing works, establishing how they would be stored and handled, and facilitating an overview of all the works to avoid having to unpack all of them every day. With the reasoning that he did not want the participants to curate works purely to his taste, Hüttner invited five professional curators to freely select artworks. These were duly transported to the gallery, forming a collection from which the Curators of the Day could choose work for their exhibition. He augmented the collection with 22 works of his own choosing, making up around a third of the whole, but significantly none of his own artwork appeared in the collection. Simultaneously, he commissioned a storage structure from the artist Gavin Wade and architect Celine Condorelli, a set of information cards from the artist Scott Rigby and an instructional video and uniform for the team of helpers from the artist Morten Goll. All of these aspects were intended to function as aids to the smooth running of the planned activities. The storage structure would house the works of art, the information cards would introduce each of the works and thereby help the Curators of the Day to reach their preliminary choice, the video and uniforms would inform the helpers of

their role and make them easily identifiable to the visitors. In addition to these aspects, from the outset the handling of the work was an issue. With all works being packed away at the end of each day there were fears of damage or wear and tear over the course of the exhibition due to large amount of handling involved. The decision was made to entrust all packing, unpacking, handling and hanging of the work to the team of helpers made up of gallery assistants who became referred to as the Gallery Crew. During the exhibition they would respond to the requests and directions the Curators of the Day regarding the placing of work, alongside offering advice and expertise.

4.2.2 Selection of works.

Hüttner and the five curators he approached to choose the works for the exhibition; Reid Shier, Melanie Keen, Lisa Le Feuvre, Tone. O Nielsen and Patrick Bernier, selected between them a total of 64 artworks by 57 artists. The selectors reached their decisions in various states of awareness of the unusual context in which they would be involved; not only dealing with the details of the gallery space, but also the participatory aspect of the exhibition and the possibility that certain works might never be selected and shown. The latter detail raised the question about whether Hüttner's concept afforded suitable recognition to the artists and their work and what status the collection of works truly had within the broader participatory logic of the experience. This factor caused some problems for both the invited curators and their selected artists alike. At least one curator declined Hüttner's invitation to select, and others who agreed to participate admitted having reservations about their role during the process of preparing for the exhibition. An insight into the nature of these we can find in Lisa Le Feuvre's text for the catalogue, in which she describes accepting with trepidation Hüttner's invitation to participate in the project: 'my uncertainty about the project really was an uncertainty about what a curator does, is and exists for' (Le Feuvre, 2005, p. 57).

The initial doubts appear to stem from fears that *I am A Curator* was attempting a definition of curatorship, which risked being reductive; focussing only on the selection and hanging of works, while ignoring the many other activities common to curatorial work. Here the pre-selection of works per-se removed the aspect of the relationships with artists, the prescribed space excluded an idea of site-specificity and the lack of time denied the possibility of creating an intellectual framework for approaching or interpreting the works and their selection. There was also a perceived danger that by fault of the functional approach to implementing the premise 'to democratise the process of curating' (Chisenhale Gallery, 2003), the necessary question of whether one can singularly define what such a process entails had been hastily passed over, in order to focus on the act of democratising something. Le Feuvre was clearly uncomfortable with tying herself to a process that demanded such reduction and might possibly have suggested a definition she was not aligned with. Fully aware of the many layers of authorship and collaboration involved in the project, she saw a risk of being instrumentalized, not necessarily by Hüttner himself, but by her tacit agreement with the project's function and the restricted view of curating this might put forward. She was originally invited as a recruiter for the curators of the day, a role that, to her relief, was eventually made redundant by the decision to adopt a first come, first served system by which individuals could volunteer. At that point she agreed instead to act as one of the invited selectors and with this position she felt more comfortable, in the belief that she could now exercise sufficient control over her own activities to add to the project, while remaining within her own critical guidelines.

'Within this framework my role was to now select artists, which extended the problems I had with being involved, but I felt now that I could engage with this as a problematic rather than it being a worry to keep me awake at night. For me an exhibition project needs to engage with three constituents: artwork, audience and context. My key concerns here were that the artists I selected did not become simply 'used' as a medium for a larger artwork, that

my selection was appropriate for its context, and that the artists I chose would be happy with the possible situation that their work would never be selected. The layers of audience bothered me too: the active audience would be the Curator of the Day, but I felt that the other visitors watching the Curators of the Day needed to be engaged in some way' (Le Feuvre, 2005, p. 59).

Le Feuvre's view that the project's problems were nevertheless interesting to engage with was one way of addressing participation, and one shared by many of the other participants in the project. The eventual selectors each separately found their own way to accept the challenge set by Hüttner's concept seeking out selection strategies that they saw as fitting to the demands of the exhibition. They invariably aimed to construct experiences within, but to a certain extent autonomous of, the larger project. This can be seen as a reaction to the problematic of instrumentalization and in most cases entailed a strategy for winning space within the logic of the project to explore their own interests and in some cases to level critique at the whole. For the selectors at least the space won was often symbolic and most readily understandable to the selector and the selected artists, although potentially open to any enquiring visitor who decided to trace back from the works to their selector. For example Tone O. Nielsen gave her selection a title; *Rocker by Choice*, suggesting that she approached the task as if designing an exhibition made up of solely these works, signalled by the act of naming the show they would potentially make up. In a similar vein, during the selection process Le Feuvre imagined how the works might be displayed together in the Chisenhale gallery itself, and playfully contemplated adopting a pseudonym, applying to be curator of the day and curating the exhibition she originally had in mind (Le Feuvre, 2005, p. 61). In such ways, several of the selectors found themselves constructing what constituted imaginary exhibitions, destined to lose their definition when the works became diluted within the larger collection. These gestures can be seen as a way of smuggling into the larger framework particular, authored agendas, while satisfying their own pleasure in putting together a selection and demonstratively including

for the visitors, albeit only in notional form, clues as to how one might think about grouping works or developing an exhibition's internal logic.

In relation to the selections of Le Feuvre and Nielsen, others appear to be less contingent on internal connections, and seek in more practical terms to provide a suitable range of works for the project or open up an available pool of works for this purpose. For example, Per Hüttner's diverse selection appears to reflect a network of friends and acquaintances he felt would provide interesting work and Melanie Keen's selection of prints, paintings and lithographs was loaned in its entirety from the Kamlish Saunders Collection. Patrick Bernier adopted the most unusual approach, deciding to remove personal taste as a criteria and add a social aspect to his selection; which he saw as an extension of the democratic process suggested by the project's overall focus. He placed an advertisement in an art magazine and posted an email on an arts mailing list offering artists the chance to be part of the exhibition at the Chisenhale Gallery in exchange for offering him accommodation for a few nights. The most hospitable responses secured participation, and their contributions of work made up his selection.

4.2.3 Participatory aesthetics

Many of the artists also chose to actively respond to the special context of the exhibition in the works they proposed or specially produced for *I am A Curator*. As a result the issue of interactivity and participation featured strongly in the collection that emerged, which contained works in a variety of media including painting, drawing, sculpture, photography and video alongside a proportionally high number of conceptual, relational and performative works. The latter categories proposed some form of action to be carried out in the gallery space, or provided instructions for a work that the curators of the day and gallery crew could enact or carry out. In a dialogue with Hannah Rickards who managed the gallery crew during the project, Hüttner describes one such work: *Instructional Video and Uniforms for a Gallery Crew*.

‘Morten Goll and Joachim Hamou created an instructional video along with specially designed ponchos worn by the Gallery Crew. The video gave advice about how they should interact with the Curator of the Day and the visitors to the gallery. The idea of the poncho was to allow for a temporary and local switch from the accepted social codes, but also to turn the work of the Gallery Crew into a form of performance’ (Hüttner & Rickards, 2005, p. 29).

Le Feuvre describes another in her essay for the catalogue:

‘Sam Ely and Lynn Harris developed a project specifically for the Chisenhale – *Playlist* – where the Curator of the Day was invited to bring to the gallery a selection of music that they would like to listen to. A portable CD player was provided, and a gallery assistant typed the play list on gallery headed paper, it was then archived, so creating an ongoing archive of playlists’ (Le Feuvre, 2005, p. 63).

Ely and Harris created a work that gave space to the musical taste of the Curator of the Day and introduced this as one of the qualities of the space during the construction of the exhibition. In this way the work addresses, at least in part, the problem of being potentially marginalised within the project by claiming space and agency outside that prescribed by the status of work in the project; namely object for storage or exhibition. It also, perhaps more positively, drew attention to the project’s voluntary protagonists. If selected, *Playlist* transformed the reception of the space for passing visitors, providing a soundtrack to the activities that implicitly drew attention to the Curator of the Day and their temporary ownership of the space. The archived lists also acted as a memory for the project, as Le Feuvre suggests when she refers to them as a series of ‘portraits’ (Le Feuvre, 2005, p. 63). She also notes how these could be seen as self-portraits, given that, in selecting the music beforehand, the curators were implicated in the choice of which portrait they

choose to leave in the space. Again, in positive way they provided a possibility of something the show appeared to lack, that being the memory over time of the ambient activity in the space, here signified through the informality of a selection of background music.

Instructional Video and Uniforms for a Gallery Crew has a very different history, because although in retrospect it was listed as one of the works made available to the Curator of the Day, it was commissioned as a permanent aspect of the exhibition. In a similar fashion to the outsourcing of particular requirements for the exhibition to Wade, Condorelli and Rigby, Hüttner approached the artist Morten Goll with a request for an outfit and interface to help aid the Gallery Crew in their work. In response Goll invited the video artist and acting coach Joachim Hamou to work with him and together they made a contribution that was simultaneously an act of support and one of critique. The video sensibly addressed some of the questions that the Gallery Crew might well be asked to answer and makes suggestions about how to best deal with these. However, in the process it systematically reveals a series of perceived shortcomings of the project. In the training video Goll and Hamou cast themselves as Gallery Crew in a series of acted scenarios in which they are confronted with difficult questions from Curator's of the Day. The video implied as problem areas: the pre-selection of the artworks, the fact that the collection only contained art, the experience of members of the public not doing the curating, the fact that the Curator's of the Day were not allowed to touch work, and most emphatically the fact that Hüttner was billed as the sole accredited author of the project. Fading to black, the video ends with melancholy classical music and the question 'is this democracy?' The unusual choice of poncho's as the uniform for the gallery crew adds to the sense that this contribution was intended as a critical commentary on the project and on the prescribed role of the gallery crew as facilitators of it. The move is rationalised by Goll in an interview after the event:

'First I designed an outrageous uniform for the crew. It was sort of a poncho made out gabardine. The idea was that the crew, when

wearing it, would have to reconsider their social position whenever they encountered new audience (because of the awkwardness of wearing this costume in front of strangers) A kind of Brechtian 'estrangement'. My hope was to bring an element of humour to the audience/crew encounter. Also, the idea was to make the crew act as servants for the audience (poncho's are low class clothing for Mexican peasants). I believed that it was necessary to underline this 'servant role', because of the nature of show' (Goll, 2008, Appendix 3).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the aim of estranging her team, the coordinator of the Gallery Crew, Hannah Rickards immediately rejected the use of the video and the ponchos and communicated this to Hüttner. In turn, he expressed concern about the video's contents and the ponchos, which he saw as potentially humiliating for the Gallery Crew. The refusal of the proposal by Rickards and Hüttner lead to a heated exchange with the artists on their arrival in London during the preparation for the opening. While Goll and Hamou defended their unequivocally provocative idea on the grounds that it was in keeping with the self-reflexive and critical nature of the project, the Gallery Crew's coordinator refused the imposition of the training and costume on grounds that it restricted the terms of their interaction with the public and the Curators of the Day and therefore denied them the democratic rights the project stood for. Eventually, after several compromises were considered, a solution was found and the ponchos and video were reframed as an artwork, joining the others in storage only to be activated on request of the Curator of the Day. Goll describes his reaction to Rickards and Hüttner's opposition to their proposal and the eventual resolution:

'First I didn't believe my own ears, since I think that our contribution was the one that really took the concept of the show seriously. I mean, they should have loved it, because it expanded and complemented their own discourse. After that I got angry and we tried to negotiate... finally we were clearly disappointed but

also somewhat proud, since, in a way, we had foreseen the problematic, as we had actually already described it in the video. It was just much more profound than we had imagined' (Goll, 2008, Appendix 3).

The work was selected by the Curator of the Day four times over the duration of the project and it is an indication of the Gallery Crew's ongoing uncertainty of their suggested role in this critical work that in all but one of these cases the video and ponchos were simply displayed rather than performed.

Rickards describes how the reaction to the work by Goll and Hamou reflected the awareness of the Gallery Crew of the specific importance of their role within the project, and even as an essentially functional part of the process, their own sense of ownership and responsibility in relation to their activity:

'We provided help with focusing, developing and realizing each day's show or process. I think this is why the initial interface for us as a Gallery Crew (devised by Holl and Gamou) (sic.) created the problems that it did. It implicated us in a particular performance, a much more theatrical performance than seemed necessary or comfortable. It certainly generated some shuttle diplomacy, and needed to, because I understand that in removing the Gallery Crew's "labour" from the initial interface we did to a certain extent leave the instructional video as an "artwork" stranded, which was a difficult situation for everyone. It was an important discussion though, without which the volunteer Gallery Crew would have been effectively disenfranchised from this exercise in democracy' (Hüttner & Rickards, 2005, p. 31).

The incident is revealing, describing how proposals and counter-proposals are alike in their defence of each individual's rights to a free role within the framework of the exhibition. Driven by an interest in making visible problems that appeared to be glossed over, Goll and Hamou consciously

overstepped the request to provide suitable costumes and training for the supporting actors in Hüttner's theatre of empowerment of the viewer. Or rather what they saw as suitable differed from Hüttner and Rickards and provided instead a set of stage directions and costumes that illuminated the Gallery Crew in compromising terms at centre stage. To extend the theatre metaphor, the Gallery Crew's coordinator recognised their function as supporting actors, but refused the limelight, imagining a quite different play to that suggested by the ponchos and training video. By withdrawing their labour she forced the demotion of the costume designer and dramaturge and all they stood for. Of course, in the broader context of the project as a whole, the artists and the Gallery Crew were in no way opposed, but rather both engaged in acts of demarcating territories for operation and as such the terms of their participation. Goll and Hamou were not the only commissioned artists to choose to transgress the request made of them by Hüttner, but they were the only one's whose contribution was censored for its unsuitability; who extended the brief too far in a direction deemed unproductive.

4.2.4 *Support Structure.*

Hüttner initially approached Gavin Wade with the brief for an artwork storage system and Wade in turn involved Celine Condorelli, with whom he had begun to develop the concept for an ongoing project looking at the nature of support. Their contribution to *I Am a Curator* became the first of several phases in the life of this project, entitled *Support Structure*, with later phases providing support for other sites with differing characteristics as Condorelli explains in an interview.

'One of the initial remits was to put *Support Structure* through a learning process by applying it to different sites. There was the art site, the corporate site, the political site, the educational site and the community site' (Condorelli, 2007, Appendix 2).

For the first phase the project received an RSA Art for Architecture grant that determined that it maintained a certain financial autonomy in relation to the Chisenhale exhibition, which Wade and Condorelli saw as only one of several interesting test sites for their research driven project. It is unsurprising that the two, seeking to address more complex questions than the simple one of how to store the work, quickly adapted the brief with Hüttner's agreement and eventually produced a more ambitious piece of exhibition architecture with very particular interests, as Condorelli describes:

“it very quickly became obvious that we weren't going to do some shelves and a table, but that we were really interested in how the show would function and what its interfaces could be...”
(Condorelli, 2007, Appendix 2).

Pursuing this interest in function and interface, in addition to storing the work the six elements of their *Support Structure* eventually also acted as a series of mobile display surfaces. These could be configured to create a virtually limitless range of exhibition layouts; when interlocked they formed a single wall the width of the gallery, allowing the curators of the day to scale down the size of the space and when arranged in a circle they created an intimate showing space within the larger gallery. With *I Am a Curator* Hüttner's initial aim appears to be to set up a game of selecting and arranging works. *Support Structure* added to the scope of the game by introducing a tool for questioning the nature of the Chisenhale space, a possibility to alter its *white cube* characteristics and, through its double role as surface and storage, to link spatial interventions to the internal logics of the works the structure contained. The structure also afforded visibility to the selectors, offering the possibility of identifying their choices within the larger collection, as each of the selector's contributions were stored in a separate, but interconnected element.

In Wade's opinion, in addition to the arguably passive qualities of raising questions about space and making particular connections visible, *Support*

Structure also had the potential for actively steering aspects of the participation of the Curators of the Day.

‘We wanted to make a structure that informed you and led you to do certain things, and provide a tool that was able to critique the exhibition, to deal with ideas of curating and to deal with all aspects of exhibition making, including the production of art. That concept was developed very strongly out of my previous work and as a response to Per’s invitation to come up with the best thing possible for this exhibition called *I Am A Curator*. We contemplated how to add to it, how to be of value and how to make the daily curators aware of what they were doing’ (Hüttner & Wade, 2004, Appendix 1).

He maintains that the structure’s aim was to function as a critical tool for looking at the exhibition project, suggesting its self-reflexive nature as well as a potentially parasitic function; as something with which one could choose to undo the host. There are similarities in Wade’s understanding of Support Structure’s role within the broader project to Goll’s statements about *Instructional Video and Uniforms for a Gallery Crew* and like Goll, Wade understands these activities of self-reflection, questioning and critique as a passage to awareness, which both strongly equate with the value of their contributions. However where Goll and Hamou focus specifically on the inherent shortcomings they see in Hüttner’s project and thereby promote awareness of a specific context alone. Wade imagines engagement with the structure as beginning with the immediate surroundings and going on to have a wider application; providing the potential for Curators of the Day to develop a critical awareness of all aspects of exhibition making and art production. The suggestion being that *I Am a Curator* could function as a form of training for its participants that could lead to skills they could apply in other cultural contexts. In the interview, he goes further stating that part of the function of support might be a form of persuasion or programmed coercion towards such awareness:

‘Support could be quite understated and hidden, something you are actually not even aware of. *Support Structure* at the Chisenhale was a huge thing, but somehow it was taken for granted. It is interesting that at the same time as being taken for granted it could actually program you to do certain things. That for me is then an underlying concern for a curator, you need to imagine that there are some programmable aspects of what you can do, but you don’t know what they all are. You set up a system to interrogate this’ (Hüttner & Wade, 2004, Appendix 1).

A critically aware public, in Wades opinion, is something one might programme through structures of support. *Support Structure* is intended as an architectural interface that seeks to find answers to the questions of whether and how this might be possible. Condorelli corroborates Wade’s statements that the influence of such architectural structures is taken for granted and often goes unnoticed.

‘What we eventually produced was unbelievably loud, a quite monstrous thing actually, but nobody ever thought about why it looked the way it did. There was a survey at the end of each day where the Curator of the Day had to fill in some forms to talk about how the exhibition worked or didn’t, including how it was facilitated, and I think one person mentioned *Support Structure*. So it seems that the structure completely disappeared and from an architectural point of view this was kind of surprising’ (Condorelli, 2007, Appendix 2).

Considering the size and unusual appearance of the structure, and the fact that it stood alone in the space when the Curator’s of the Day approached their challenge, both its creators were surprised by how little feedback referred to its role. Questioning why this might be the case Condorelli

considered the functional nature of architecture in the context of the gallery as a primary factor.

‘This is something about invisibility, functional things fall into a hierarchy that mean they are understood as not as important as what people think the focus is, in this case the art in the exhibition itself. Although of course everything in the gallery was conditioned by the way Support Structure worked, or didn’t work; the way in which it failed’ (Condorelli, 2007, Appendix 2).

Like Wade she is convinced that the structure played an active role in the project, but in a notable difference to his focus on the structure’s subliminal ability to coerce people, Condorelli explores the question of its presence in relation to existing hierarchies. Specifically she references how, in gallery environments, architecture has traditionally adopted a low rung on the ladder of visibility. In her understanding of the structure’s role she notes that it conditioned everything in the gallery, for better or worse. Here she concurs with Wade’s idea that the structure was somehow a test or experiment, constructed without a predefined idea of how it would be used or misused. In a similar fashion there is a sense that the collaboration allowed the two were openly exploring functional tenets without much attention to aesthetics. Condorelli describes how by the time of the opening they both ended up with something they saw as alien to their individual practice.

‘Most interesting for me was the fact that, once built, I didn’t recognize the structure. I really had never thought about what this thing was going to look like, which I know sounds a little strange. During the lead up to the exhibition we kept on going to the workshop, but the structure grew out of so many decisions that came along the way that when it was finished and standing in the space it was the most bizarre object. This was strange but also empowering because at such points you realise that the work can go a little further than what you can articulate by yourself. I

remember being quite helpless in front of it. On the night of the opening, at which Per had made the decision to leave all the work in the Support Structure, meaning that there was effectively nothing to see, Gavin and I really couldn't deal with it and we ended up standing outside thinking 'God, what is this thing?' (Condorelli, 2007, Appendix 2).

Her statement reveals the nature of the collaboration between Condorelli and Wade. The exchanges of ideas lead them away from their singular practices and resulted in a structure that they both felt estranged from, but empowered by. For Condorelli this dichotomy arose from her understanding of how the experience had extended her own capability in a positive fashion coupled with helplessness in the face of the bizarre appearance of what she had co-created. This outcome can be in part attributed to their process of continually exchanging ideas and the making and remaking of numerous decisions along the way, but should also be seen as a result of their interest in 'support' as a way of serving function. Condorelli qualifies her identification of the structure as a functional thing, by describing it as a 'performative object'. Importantly its performative nature began not with its completion, but with its commissioning; by following function their working method itself appears as performative as the way the structure was used by Curator's of the Day during the exhibition. The remit to examine support seems to have had a coercive effect on Wade and Condorelli just as the structure in turn would suggest particular uses and result in surprising constellations.

There is a clear alignment here with Hüttner's approach to the project as a whole, where a premise is set up, not as a control mechanism, but as a functional framework for hanging new possibilities upon. In this process the focus is placed on use, not appearance. On both the macro level (the exhibition project) and the micro level (support structure) the onus is functional, and in pursuit of making things function the various possibilities for use are developed. The development of responses to this premise can be

observed in both the pre- and post- production stages; in the periods before and after the exhibitions opening to the public.

4.2.5 *Interface Cards*

Like Goll, Wade and Condorelli, Scott Rigby was also invited by Hüttner and understood his contribution as an artwork as well as a facilitating tool, a duality that was mirrored in the fact that the deck of oversized cards he provided had two titles, as an artwork Rigby gave it the title *I-Deal Opportunities*, but for the exhibition's purposes he agreed with Hüttner's request for a simpler title and renamed the deck simply *Interface Cards*. Rigby's work as an artist has focussed on the social aspects tied up in the processes of making art. He has created objects, structures or environments that promote exchange between their viewers about the creative process, and made many works together with others in relation to his role in the collective running of the independent space Basekamp in Philadelphia, which focuses strictly on collaboration in cultural production. The invitation to participate emerged from conversations over a longer period of time with Hüttner about collaboration, and was sparked by a chance overlapping of interests when Rigby visited him in Paris several months before the exhibition. In a previous exhibition organised by Hüttner, entitled *Curatorial Market*, Rigby produced the work *I Deal Art for the Market* a sculpture and text work produced in collaboration with Gavin Wade. A folded cardboard structure acted as a presentation platform for a series of small booklets, which posed questions about the surroundings of the exhibition, an indoor market, and the economies associated with art. The booklets had originally been envisaged as a pack of cards, an idea Rigby liked because of the connotation of the pack as an invitation to play a game, but eventually the idea was dropped for practical reasons. In Paris, Rigby revived the idea in conversation with Hüttner and they agreed that the cards might work as part of *I Am a Curator*. The deck of cards idea seemed well suited to Hüttner's concept and over the coming months Rigby set about designing the set, each

card corresponding to one of the works available for exhibition in *I Am a Curator*.

Rigby described the cards as both ‘surrogates’ for the works and ‘stand-ins’ for the artists (Rigby, 2005, p. 89). The latter function he encouraged by including biographical information and selected quotations from the artists on the cards alongside images representing the works. In essence the cards were functional, and served to relieve some of the time and handling pressures associated with the project; one set was made available to the curators of the day to browse upon arrival at the gallery and during the project a downloadable set of the cards was viewable on the Chisenhale’s website so that they could consider their selection before their visit. The curators of the day, almost without exception, made alterations to their preliminary selection upon seeing the works themselves, but again the cards came in useful in rethinking these selections and pulling new works out of storage for consideration. Like Wade and Condorelli, Rigby chose to respond to a fairly simple brief with a complex contribution. Borrowing a design from the architects Charles and Ray Eames he produced the cards so that they could be slotted together, making it possible to build towers or more complex structures with the pack. A second pack was provided for the exhibition so that both the curators of the day and the visiting public could play the game of building such card houses. Given their status as representations of both artists and works, Rigby understood this activity as ‘making architectural structures that were not only blueprints for a possible exhibition, but were also hypothetical social structures with mostly unrealized relational possibilities’ (Rigby, 2005, p. 89).

Rigby extended the brief given by seeking not only a guide to the works but also a way of standing in for the artists themselves, who are conspicuously missing from the experience proposed to the Curators of the Day. The activity proposed begins with a collection of works without reference to the social interaction common to a curator’s selection of work and artists; the familiarity with each other’s practice and the ongoing discussions that

frequently prompt a curator to invite an artist to exhibit and the artist to accept. In his injection of biographical and personal material into the interpretational level afforded by the cards, Rigby is attempting to point backwards to the selections that have been made, to make up for the lack of knowledge this pre-selection has effected and to afford the Curators of the Day an albeit limited view of the individual authors behind the works. His interest in adopting the slotted design, which allows interlinking of cards and his insistence that these be made available to Curators of the Day and visitors alike point to a further, perhaps more broadly critical observation. The questions these 'hypothetical structures' propose is that of what connections the artists might have to one another as people, who might enjoy meeting who and what might that meeting bring about? These questions address the fallibility of art exhibitions as a whole to represent human connections between the makers involved, and they point to an imagined social gathering, a parallel game to that being played at the Chisenhale.

4.2.6 The Curators of the Day

Lisa Lefeuve's account of her original role in the project describes how Hüttner was initially considering that someone might be responsible for a pre-selection of Curators of the Day. Eventually Hüttner and the Gallery reached the decision to throw open the selection to a voluntary process, by which anybody could apply. Although this decision seems to have been made relatively late in the preparation of the exhibition, in hindsight Hüttner states that he had always considered involving a variety of people as Curators of the Day.

'The original idea was to invite members of the public to come each day of the project and, during one afternoon, put together an exhibition at the Chisenhale. I made sure that these slots would be made available as democratically as possible, divided between different people from different backgrounds and ages' (Hüttner & Wade, 2004, Appendix 1).

The eventual group of volunteers that made up the Curators of the Day included local residents, school children, arts students, artists, writers and poets, professional curators, the gallery staff themselves and friends, acquaintances and family members of those involved. The group of participants ranged in age from primary school to elderly, included a balance of genders and of racial backgrounds. Around one half of the Curators of the Day were involved in some way with the visual arts, while the others came from other professional areas and a small number had had very little contact with art and exhibitions. The selection undoubtedly met the institution's wishes for an outreach project that engaged new audiences representative of the mix of residents in the local area, while simultaneously meeting Hüttner's artistic interests for the project. When asked about his intentions behind involving non-art audiences in his project he replied.

'I am interested in different layers of reality, as perceived by different kinds of people. This goes also for *I am a Curator*, where working with different members of the public can be seen as a learning process, as much for me as for them' (Hüttner & Wade, 2004, Appendix 1).

His interest in different kinds of people appears tied in a quasi-scientific way to the idea of *I am a Curator* as a form of experiment; a term Hüttner uses in his promotion of the project. The diversity of the subjects who are put through the experiment is important for Hüttner as a way of testing his thesis on the interpretation of art, which he declares in the catalogue to be the primary focus of the project.

'Every visitor can experience it (art) differently and there is no right or wrong way of understanding an artwork – just different points of view. In a society that shows little appreciation for ambiguity, art and its subjectivity offers a much appreciated refuge

thanks to its complexity and its freedom to be continuously reinterpreted' (Hüttner & Rickards, 2005, p. 19).

Both Hüttner's continual presence as supervisor and the forms which he asked participants to fill out at the end of each day add weight to the experiment analogy, in which he assumes the role of the observing scientist. Rickards compiled a number of graphs and tables with the data that emerged from the project, which Hüttner included in the catalogue commenting in their dialogue:

'The data that I Am a Curator generated is in itself something that would suffice for a research project. The spreadsheets, graphs and information that you compiled are something that is very important in this respect. They offer possibilities for free interpretations of what took place during the project and do so by appropriating a scientific language' (Hüttner & Rickards, 2005, p. 33).

These represent which works were chosen with which frequency on which days and affect a sort of league table of the selectors detailing their share of the work selected each week and the popularity of their selection overall. Asked about his relationship to the public Hüttner acknowledges his influences in a way that give credence to seeing these aspects of the project as a conscious reference to scientific approaches to knowledge.

'Most of my time in art school was spent collaborating with scientists, particularly people involved in medical research. My initial aim was to prove that art could be as precise and exact as science. After a few years I realised that it was the other way around, that science is exactly as haphazard as art. It is just that the rules that apply are viewed differently and inscribed in different systems of evaluation. What I learnt from this experience was the value of appropriating parts of the

methodology of science, and I think that I use that a lot in my work' (Hüttner & Wade, 2004, Appendix 1).

Hannah Rickards and Hüttner provide an insight into the experiences of the Curator's of the Day in the catalogue. In response to Hüttner's professed interest in provoking discussion with the Curator of the Day about the questions surrounding how we exhibit and interpret art, Rickard's notes how the short timescale afforded to them for their task placed them under pressure to select and hang the show, leaving little room for discussion.

'What interests me is how you see the discussion – where was its primary intended focus? I suppose that I mean mainly in terms of the Curator of the Day. What became apparent initially when the show opened was that discussion about the complexity of the situation was difficult to induce. Within this untested process it was difficult to counter a tentative 'curation is easy, approach' to the first period of the show. Thus, the individual slots seemed to be less speculative attempts than a concerted effort to get a tidy looking bunch of work on the wall by 5.45pm' (Hüttner & Rickards, 2005, p. 21).

The accounts of some of the Curators of the Day themselves support her reflections. In their feedback form, the poets Fawzia Kane and Jacqueline Gabbittas likened the initial pressure to a poetry workshop where the accent lies on production rather than discourse.

'There is a strange pressure to present a finished product (more like a workshop feel): that rather than pushing at the words we're seeing (and allowing them to push back) we should be containing them in a form. In the same way that to produce a poem is the pressure from a workshop' (Hüttner & Rickards, 2005, p. 21).

However, in the same account we learn that the two responded to this pressure by abandoning the idea of presenting a finished exhibition in favour of using the environment to develop their writing. Decisions like this one were increasingly encouraged by Rickards and Hüttner as they became aware of the propensity for time-pressures to lead to what Rickards describes as ‘a sort of curatorial ram raid’ (Hüttner & Rickards, 2005, p. 39), where the Curators of the Day were so set on getting the work on the walls, that little opportunity was left for reflection on what they were doing or why. Around half way through the run of the exhibition they changed their advice to Curator’s of the Day, asking them to consider all possibilities rather than immediately addressing the task of completing an exhibition. This revision of earlier rules is of significance for this analysis of this project as it signifies a rupture, and a moment where the process of self-reflection results in an evolution of a specific part of the project. Hüttner describes this as a move towards challenging and provoking the volunteer, arguing that a false sense of politeness had until then caused them to refrain from intervening if the volunteer appeared interested only in enacting the mechanics of the game. In his opinion, once the necessity of completing a *perfect* exhibition was removed, the process lead to more interesting responses

In the case of Anton Nikolotov he chose to respond to the task without displaying a single work. Instead, as Hüttner describes, he involved the exhibition visitors in an ongoing discussion about what, if any, of the works they might exhibit.

‘One of the curators of the day even came in and said, ‘we’re just going to spend the whole day discussing which work is going to be in the show’. The day was spent in a democratic discussion where everyone had to vote. This was a very deliberate creative choice, ‘we’re not going to show anything’. This shows how *I Am A Curator* raised questions about the idea of the elitism of art, in particular questions having to do with access, democracy and the

roles of the artists, the beholder and the curator' (Hüttner & Wade, 2004, Appendix 1).

Nikolotov's approach, as Hüttner correctly identifies, is clearly driven by an urge to further open up the premise of *I Am a Curator*, to extend the participatory logic of the show to the visiting public and to make transparent the connections between selection and personal taste. There are parallels to Patrick Bernier's approach to providing works for the exhibition; to his use of a simple advertisement offering participation in return for hospitality. Both contributions, in different ways point to the duality of curatorial work as it upholds on the one hand the hegemony of individual taste while claiming on the other to be in the service of the visitor. Although Hüttner points to both of these interventions into the project as exciting and commendable anomalies which show how the project raised difficult critical questions, he chooses to overlook the fact that they may well have been intended as a direct critique of the project itself.

4.2.7 Initiation, Commissioning & Collaboration

Hüttner frequently mentions collaboration as the cornerstone of his work and applies the term liberally in his description of *I Am a Curator*.

'The collaborative aspect remains central to my practice, but has branched out to involving many different implicit and explicit forms of collaborations... being an experienced collaborator made arranging exhibitions and other projects in contemporary art both natural and from a practical point of view relatively easy... The processes of developing projects are often long and complex. When you collaborate with a large number of people it is often a question of an ongoing negotiations and discussions where the answers and solutions materialise as you go along. A perfect example of this is *I Am a Curator*' (Hüttner, 2004).

In this description Hüttner claims that his organisational approach centred on the shared development of ideas and co-production of the constituent parts of the exhibition apparatus, and that problems were discussed and solved in the process. However, despite his use of the term collaboration and his conditioning of what it meant in this case; with the vague distinction made between explicit and implicit forms of working in this way, testimonies from the individuals he chose to work on the project question whether the term was really suitable. The most notable critic of the use of this term being Gavin Wade:

‘I have to say that I disagree that this was a collaborative project. Per was the director of the project and he invited me to provide a service. To do this I collaborated with Celine but not with Per, although his ideas and his invitation provided my context. This was really a case of a commissioner and a brief, so for me there wasn’t collaboration between us as such’ (Hüttner & Wade, 2004, Appendix 1).

In his comment Wade proposes an essential difference between commissioning and collaborating, and in his case between the working method he shared with Hüttner on the one hand and Condorelli on the other. The idea of the nature of ongoing exchange during a process is important here and made clear in Wade’s reference to the brief as a starting point for a period of work. The term suggests a process by which, once an agreement has been reached as to what suits both partners the work is carried out with a minimum of consultation. Condorelli describes how this process was actively encouraged by Hüttner’s very open approach in their preliminary discussions about involvement in the project:

‘For me the work was completely related to a commissioning logic, but strangely enough Per was very open and trusting about the nature of this. After we argued our position he accepted quite

quickly that this piece, Support Structure, could be both a work in the show and a tool for helping how the show worked...’ (Condorelli, 2007, Appendix 2).

Collaboration in the artistic field often denotes that each of the partners initially has freedom to be creative on their own terms, and that the work emerges from a process of ongoing negotiation about the nature of this creativity. There is perhaps a case to argue that Hüttner understood the openness of his brief as a precursor to collaboration, which as he became more absorbed in managing the many sides of the project, remained undeveloped. Though regularly in touch with the majority of the participants over the working period Hüttner did not interfere with their interpretations of his brief until they arrived ready to be implemented in the gallery. Goll remembers how his own contribution came about and reinforces Wade’s conviction that the hands-off approach to commissioning should not be understood as collaborative.

‘I accepted the commission because he presented it as a collaboration. That’s why we made such a site-specific piece. But we did not collaborate with Per during conceptualization or production. It was his idea to ask me to produce uniforms. But I remember that I told him that I wanted free hands and absolute integrity, which he accepted (at first)’ (Goll, 2008, Appendix 3).

In addition to the participant’s thoughts on the matter the incident involving Goll and Hamou’s work seems to provide further proof that Hüttner was not co-conceptualising or co-producing the outsourced parts of the exhibition apparatus in the stages preceding the opening. His surprised response to *Instructional Video and Uniforms for a Gallery Crew* and its ensuing censorship make this clear; how could he have responded this way had he been involved in its production?

If the term collaboration appears incorrect, there is a question whether commission is suitable here either. Condorelli's surprise at Hüttner's openness to a departure from his original brief, and Goll's comments on the independence which he was granted in developing the uniforms and video both suggest that Hüttner was not interested in what his partners eventually produced, so much as in their involvement in the project per se. A commission denotes the passing over of authority to fulfil a specific role, with accompanying responsibilities, but the situation here was potentially much looser as the partners clearly felt free to choose other roles within the project without necessarily consulting Hüttner. There is a sense in which Hüttner outsourced and subcontracted all the visible trappings of the exhibition and, for the large part, much of the thinking behind how these would function, leaving his role far from clear. In hindsight Hüttner revealingly stated:

'In *I Am a Curator* I did not produce any physical work, yet the project remained my solo show. It thus suggested that the essence in the artwork lies in the idea' (Hüttner, 2004).

If understood by the artist as a conceptual or relational work of art, all activities happening within the project would become subordinate to the idea that they represent. Hüttner sees the idea *to let the public curate an exhibition* as the essence of the work *I Am a Curator* and logically what follows belongs to this work. There is no doubt that this statement raises major questions concerning authorship and these are addressed later, but it also points to a better understanding of Hüttner's relationship to his partners in the project.

In his open approach it becomes evident that Hüttner's key contribution was as originator or *concepteur* and not as collaborator or commissioner. He came up with the premise for the exhibition, and facilitated its physical context in the form of the Chisenhale Gallery. But his role beyond the provision of a starting point and a context was for the greatest part managerial and supervisory; once he had ascertained what tasks needed

fulfilling, he busied himself with overseeing the practical application of the project. Through observation of the different contributions that evolved on his invitation over the months before opening, it becomes clear that *I Am a Curator* was the result of a mass of separate and at times conflicting reactions to Hüttner's premise of enabling the public to curate an exhibition. The participants sought in their own ways to imagine the project and to address the inherent challenges of its central concept; a process that necessarily not only involved fulfilling functional requirements but also delivering critical viewpoints to condition their activity. The need to do the latter is a clear indication of the lack of consensus between the various parties, or better said that consensus was never seen as necessary.

4.2.8 Introduction to analysis

One of the challenges of analysing the exhibition *I am a Curator* arises in trying to decipher the various statements of its initiator Per Hüttner, which frequently contradict one another. However, rather than discount this central figure's descriptions of his aims, reasoning and reflections on the project due to their lack of continuity, it is key to look closely at these and try to understand how they tally with other accounts. It is important also to identify the contradictions and consider how on the one hand they may reflect Hüttner's open working method and his interest in revealing the problematic of singular interpretations of artistic activity, and on the other how they are central to critique of the project. It is certain that, as initiator of the project and key advisor to the Curators of the Day, Hüttner was able to steer the project more than any other of the many parties involved and critical responses to the exhibition inevitably responded not only to what was observed, but to Hüttner's claims for the project. A further reason for an analysis of his role is what it can reveal about the relationship between the two central, critical and perhaps least compatible aspects of the project; outwardly its engagement with the issue of access to participation in cultural processes, and inwardly the issue of critiquing power structures within the institutionalised art world. Considering this relationship we can understand

both aspects as hinging around the issue of authorship, in terms of who is allowed to speak and who is named.

Since his graduation from art-college in 1993 Hüttner has described himself variously as either an artist or an artist-curator. Which of the two descriptions he favours at any given time appears loosely connected to whether he is referring to his practice of producing photographs, drawings and performances; the creative part of which he carries out alone, or his history of running art-spaces and collaborating with other artists on experimental exhibition projects; where the creative process is shared and the practice co-authored. The former activity he has always termed his artistic practice and for his role in the latter he has traditionally adopted the commonplace term artist-curator. *I Am a Curator* was however atypical of this approach and appears to mark a moment where he decided to abandon the latter term in favour of only using the former for all his production. Indeed throughout the project Hüttner eschewed the artist-curator tag and described himself as an artist, an approach that he has maintained in his projects since that time. This change in the way he labels his practice may seem relatively inconsequential, but in a project that overtly addresses the power balance in the production, mediation and reception of art and which adopts the provocative title *I am a Curator*, Hüttner's decision is intriguing. He elaborates on this moment in his text *It's good to be an artist again*, published a year after the project in 2004. In the text Hüttner describes his interest in the activities of curators and what he terms the paradigm of curating:

'My interest in curation sprung from a realisation that some professional curators were doing projects that were closer to my ideas and ideals and that they were more creative, more interesting than most artists' work. Similarly the work of many artist-curators were (sic) of equal interest to me, but from a different perspective. Common for these projects was that they offered new challenges both for the artists, audiences and curators.

In most instances the new approaches to exhibition making also created previously unseen forms for collaboration' (Hüttner, 2004).

Hüttner's comments make clear that his primary interest in curatorial practice is in the collaborative, participatory and performative possibilities it has at its disposal. The impulse that guides him in this territory, in relation to standard readings of curating, is anti-establishment and progressive. Probing the possibility of exhibition as stage or forum for addressing mutual challenges, where artists, curators and audience members are joined in the act of working together to make sense of these. Furthermore the nature of the collaborations that Hüttner seeks emerge from the project in a performative fashion, as it happens or along the way, resulting in 'previously unseen forms'; the unseen here meaning both new and unexpected. By way of example he briefly introduces two curatorial positions that he admires. Firstly that of the Danish independent curator Tone O Nielsen, who has long pursued collaborative models of exhibition production, developing projects with groups of artists and other politically and socially active groups and Locus + in Newcastle which was born out of an artists collective and is known for producing artist's projects in public and non-art spaces within the urban environment. Both examples can lead us to reflect that Hüttner's understanding of what constitutes the curatorial paradigm is at odds to that informed by entrenched institutional approaches to curating. In these the positions of artist, curator and audience are kept at a distance from one another and, perhaps more importantly, the main focus of exhibition is precisely that which Hüttner leaves out in this description of what he admires in curatorial work; the issue of showing artwork. It seems inevitable that the difference between his understanding of 'curation' and the values that others attached to the term curator, were to become debating points over the period of developing and presenting his project *I am a Curator*.

Part of Hüttner's decision no longer to separate between his artistic and curatorial work lies in his claim that both sides to his activity are driven by

similar aims. In interview it becomes clear that of all the differing justifications for the *I Am a Curator* project, the truest for him is the most personal; that driven by Hüttner's own romantic impulse for pain and discovery.

‘All my work is about pain, and there is a level of masochism involved in the way that I approach my projects. I think you need to make these labour intensive, crazy, insane, projects in order to find out what it is that you want and need to do as an artist’ (Hüttner & Wade, 2004, Appendix 1).

For Hüttner the starting point for his work is egotistical; driven by an urge for self-knowledge, and both his artistic work and, as an extension of this, his curatorial work share this quality. The public play an important role in this process, but for the most part this is as a foil to Hüttner himself, producing a real and vulnerable context that he requires in his work.

‘...in my artistic-curatorial practice I am dealing with exactly the same issues that I do in my photographic practice. My photographic work is always shot in busy public spaces, and I am putting myself in this situation in order to raise issues about vulnerability, but also about the role of the artist, about what is staged and what is real’ (Hüttner & Wade, 2004, Appendix 1).

Hüttner's carrying of his individual artistic agenda into the field of curatorial work is key to an understanding of the project. There can be no doubt that a professed masochism and self-exposure is an unusual starting point for a curator to making exhibitions, and that there are many implied professional codes in relation to the public figure of the curator that fit uneasily with the self-centred working methods which Hüttner describes. In addition to his role as concepteur we have also to bear in mind the importance of his role as advisor to the Curators of the Day. Scott Rigby points to the central importance of this aspect of the project when he notes that if there was a

clearly collaborative aspect to Hüttner's work on the project, it was in his work with the Curators of the Day not with the selectors or the artists to whom specific tasks were outsourced. As such Hüttner prescribed himself a privileged, if labour intensive, role in the project as it is he who conceived of the premise for the exhibition and he who got to observe first hand the project as a whole, placing himself in the position to challenge and provoke the Curators of the Day at any time in what amounted to their collaborative efforts. Furthermore, he continuously mediated the reception of his idea and its interpretation and it is clear that the project would have been very different had he stepped away from his functioning structure after the opening.

4.2.9 *Exhibition as game/play*

The analogies adopted in this analysis to game playing, theatre and scientific experimentation are carefully chosen as they in turn explore the idea that the project is a form of guided fiction. The game and the theatre are clearly situations where reality is suspended and particular roles are adopted and accepted for a period of time. The aspect of simulation is also the basis of scientific experimentation, where particular proposed truths are tested under controlled situations. These analogies also point in various ways to the function of *I Am a Curator's* central premise; the switching of roles is a representative rather than literal activity and the participants are *playing* curator rather than *being* one. This fact is accentuated in Hüttner's suggestion that the whole process might be best understood as a conceptual work of art, with all the ambiguities such a term allows. It is significant that Hüttner was initially considering the title *Everyone is a Curator*, in reference to the phrase 'Jeder Mensch ist ein Kuenstler' (trans: everyone is an artist) attributed to Joseph Beuys. This statement, which although still the topic of much discussion is broadly understood by art historians as figurative not literal, and as much a proposed revision of the term artist as a philosophical rumination of the potential of the individual's creative role within society as a whole. The phrase serves as a leitmotif for Beuys' concept of Social Sculpture,

which he described as the process of how we mould and shape the world in which we live. The concept of a transformation of status from people to artists was mirrored in his sculptures that utilised everyday objects or situations; the status of which was also to be understood as in the process of transformation. In his original choice of title Hüttner appears to be considering a link between the project and the possibilities suggested by Beuys' ideas about the transformation of art, and arguably even under its eventual title *I Am a Curator* adopts a similar logic to that of Social Sculpture. Beuys was not suggesting that everyone was capable of painting or sculpting in a traditional sense, but heralding a change of role and adopting a structure in order to give content and a focus for debate about art's social purpose. In Hüttner's project he is also not suggesting that his volunteers are as good as the professionals and the structure for imaginative transformation is not sculpture, but exhibition.

Of course, pursuing the game analogy proposed at the beginning of this case study, *I Am a Curator* belongs to the genre of mimetic games that select, simplify and represent parameters of a given real-life situation as the basis for enjoyable game-play. The cultural theorist and historian Johan Huizinga describes this process in his book *Homo Ludens, A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (Huizinga, 1955), in which he discusses the central role of play in the establishment and evolution of culture. He makes the point out that 'play' fundamentally differs from 'real' or 'ordinary' life, and adds that one important aspect of the activity is fun. If we follow Huizinga's introduction, in a play situation events are simulated and although the participants may learn something in the process the outcomes are symbolic and figurative rather than real. The board game Monopoly for example is a simplified representation of the property market, which may train its players in the basics of speculation and let them get to know one another better, but which does not lead to real bankruptcy or riches. In fact the element of fun comes in part from the suspension of the real or ordinary, one can for example go spectacularly bankrupt in Monopoly and laugh at the experience. In addition to the mimetic qualities, the shortened timescale for the activity in *I Am a*

Curator is a further aspect pointing to its game-like qualities, and Huizinga also identifies duration as a factor in conditioning play. In the same way that while playing a game one can build an empire and lose it again in an afternoon, Hüttner's volunteers assume the role of curator for a single day only, within which they have to carry out a task which normally takes much longer.

There is however an important semantic difference between the terms game and play and in interview Gavin Wade, perhaps in reference to the ideas of Huizinga, proposes what this might suggest in the case of *Support Structure's* involvement in *I Am a Curator*.

'I don't think the exhibition and the things that I have talked about are a game as such, but I think they are resolutely 'play'. The big difference is that with a game there is one goal, there is one outcome and one way of winning, and with open play, there are structures and rules and systems but there is no singular goal' (Hüttner & Wade, 2004, Appendix 1).

Huizinga sees freedom as central to the act of play and Wade's mention of 'open play' appears to echo the point of view that, unlike goal driven games, play can be a non-linear activity without a specific end or aim. Hüttner and Rickards decision to change there advice to Curators of the Day is a reflection of how paramount this difference was for the project. When volunteers were preoccupied with the goal of finishing an exhibition, both the artist and the Gallery Crew Manager became progressively dissatisfied with the results. Prompted to see the gallery as a context for non-competitive play, the parameters for success changed and so, in turn, did the nature of formal responses to be seen in the gallery. In retrospect Hüttner refers to the freedom of the play made possible by this openness as one of the project's important differences to other so called 'interactive' exhibitions.

'This show was truly interactive because when the Curator of the Day came in, they were given this resource, and three people working for

them the whole day. By ‘true interactivity’ I mean opposing the ‘push button’ mentality, which can be seen as pseudo-interactivity, and actually offering people a chance to create something themselves’ (Hüttner & Wade, 2004, Appendix 1).

The experience for the Curators of the Day was certainly a creative and interactive one. The exhibition did, as Hüttner hoped lead to discussions between himself, the curators of the day and the gallery crew and these on occasion extended to involved the casual visitors to the gallery as well. Inevitably the topics of discussion revolved around the task at hand and in the process there can be no doubt that the project raised awareness for many of the Curators of the Day of the complex hierarchies and power structures involved in making exhibitions, and the influence of curatorial taste in the construction of what appear outwardly to be neutral structures. In this way the project exposed the mechanics of the exhibitionary complex (Bennett, 1996), and it did so in a carnivalesque fashion; by upending normal hierarchies for a short period and allowing play to take the lead.

4.2.10 Exhibition as conceptual artwork

Understood as a conceptual work of art, Hüttner’s idea to representatively give the public the role of the curator should be read as a clear critique of the inflexible models that exist for the exhibition, and by proxy of those people who benefit from maintaining these models. As such *I Am a Curator* belongs to a tradition of institutionally critical projects by artists whose work infringes on the role of the curator in order to point out the inadequacies and elitist tendencies of exhibitions and the institutions that house them. The introduction of an interpretational reversal can be seen in different but comparable ways in the work of artists like Group Material (O’Neill, 2004b, p. 8), in projects like *The People’s Choice (Arroz con Mango)* in 1981 and Fred Wilson in his interventions in historical museums such as *Mining the Museum* in 1992 . Looking again at the unconventional curatorial paradigm

described by Hüttner in his article *It's good to be an artist again*, the background to this project is clear. Indeed the aspects of curatorial work that he finds so interesting are innately critical, intent as they are in rephrasing the 'correct' context for art and extending its boundaries to incorporate non-art audiences and question art world hierarchies. Interpretational reversal was the root of the criticality involved in the project, as it reflects on the restrictions of ritualised models of exhibition making while moving beyond this to imagine an alternative. In fact the critique was developed a step further by not only imagining the alternative but attempting to enact it. In *I Am a Curator* Hüttner harnessed the possibilities of a game-like structure to encourage members of the public to perform the reversal of hierarchies. Cliff Steinberg, an arts professional, advisor on the project and one of the Curators of the Day, aptly described the link between the project's specific invitation of public involvement and a broader critique of a perceived elitism in the field of contemporary art.

'For me one of the key ideas of *I Am a Curator* was its inclusive nature. The process is the sum of the active parts, quite literally in this case. Also the project represents a kind of democratization of art generally. It is furthermore part of a whole swathe of things going on that are reaching outside of the familiar boundaries of 'high end contemporary art', which has in the main until recently always guarded its doors to the non-art professional' (Hüttner & Rickards, 2005, p. 21).

It is important to note how loosely Steinberg uses the term 'democratization' here, referring to a 'general democratization of art', a phrase that matches that of the press release, which talks of 'democratising the curatorial process'. In both cases it appears as shorthand for simply opening out a process to the public, and as such might be considered synonymous with the less favoured term *popularisation*. The point being that in the eyes of Steinberg and the Chisenhale the democratic aspect of the project is focussed in its addressing of new audiences. The questions remain as to whether this focus is the correct

site of democratic activity or merely populist, what would really be required to democratise art or the curatorial process, and whether such a transformation would be desirable? This issue is discussed further in the following chapter. Regardless of these questions the broad range of people whose work was brought together in the project impressed Steinberg and he saw the coalition of the different participants and the way in which the project appeared to weight them equally, as commendably democratic. In his opinion the art world and perhaps by implication the professional institutions had, at that time, a history of guarding their doors against those not already familiar with their discourse, and he saw *I Am a Curator* as part of a broader movement to incorporate these other publics in the discourse about exhibitions.

4.2.11 *Credit where credit is due?*

It is common that during the research and production phases, an exhibition project incorporates the work of a wide range of specialists from different fields, and that once opened it attracts and engages an even greater range of audience members. However, *I Am a Curator* was an unusual exhibition both in the terms by which the co-production of the exhibition took place, and in the way the traditionally distinct stages of production and reception were blurred. It is in the nature of Hüttner's working method to discuss his ideas informally with a large number of his peers and this conversational approach appears to have been extended to his hands-off outsourcing of the functional aspects of the exhibition to other artists and specialists, with little attempt to retain control over these. Instead, the central idea of the exhibition acted as a focus for all levels of participation, and those who Hüttner asked to provide for the exhibition did so in such a way that the eventual event should be seen as an amalgamation of numerous different projects, provoked by his original idea for an activity. These projects included not only large scale contributions like Wade and Condorelli's Support Structure and more discrete one's like Scott Ridley's information cards, but also Goll and Hamou's rejected uniforms and training video. Several of the selectors also responded with

discrete projects and, within the collection these made up, many of the contributing artists also reacted to the exhibition context with specific works. But, after the presentation of the dormant exhibition-in-waiting at the opening, during which the works were housed in the support structure and the efforts of these first level contributors for the most part out of sight, the course of the exhibition saw a further series of projects. Most notably of course it was the Curator's of the Day who formed and presented new selections and non-selections for the following six weeks, but other project building was underway in the development over time of the distinctive code of conduct of Hüttner, Rickards and the Gallery Crew.

Again, it is not unusual to have an exhibition, which displays several projects by different artists in response to a theme, a question or a premise. Nor is it unique to have artists involved in designing displays or interpretation. In this case however the diffuse commissioning structure saw project's emerging in parallel rather than in tidy unison, in relation to divergent interpretations of the central point of the exhibition and without the controlling or sense-making hand of a curator. Hüttner's decision to see the project as a concept and openly invite responses resulted in a production open to antagonistic moments, with its contents pushing in different directions and harbouring at times conflicting agendas. Similarly, the Curators of the Day were actively encouraged to question what was expected of them. Scott Rigby referred to the working period as marked by negotiation and integration, and this seems to apply to both the pre- and post- opening stages of *I am a Curator*. All participants, including the Curators of the Day had first to negotiate their own interest in the task and conclude by agreeing on the terms by which their labour might be integrated into the whole.

Regardless of the clear critical potential explored in the project's level of interactivity, its antagonistic co-production and resultant live enactment of a reversal of hierarchical power, the question remains as to how much of this was intended by Hüttner, and how much emerged from the communal efforts of the many co-producing participants. Given that much of the text available

on the exhibition is written retrospectively, this uncertainty remains. However it is clear from an analysis of his functional approach to the project and from his statements regarding the project as a work of conceptual art that Hüttner worked essentially from an artistic starting point. In this frame of mind the idea functioned first and foremost as a figurative gesture, comparable to a social sculpture. In his double role as concepteur and advisor to the Curators of the Day, he was primarily interested in the critical power of the idea of the public curating and re-curating an exhibition and secondarily in the discursive activity about making and showing art that might emerge from playing out this idea as a simulation. At no point does Hüttner imagine that the project will have a real effect on the hierarchies that exist, at the Chisenhale and further afield, and as such, unlike the work of other artists it was never intended as a project for real social change.

However, an analysis of the project reveals a number of clear misjudgements by Hüttner and miscommunications by the gallery about the nature of the project and its aims, that resulted in the project and its initiator receiving considerable critique, both from his peers involved in its production and from independent art critics who visited the exhibition. These seem in the most part to spring from a conflict between the nature of the artistic project that emerged from the coalition of people involved in it and Hüttner's interest in representing it as the outreach project the gallery wished to commission. This misrepresentation of the project is visible in the press and marketing where the exhibition is referred to as an exercise in democratising the curatorial process, suggesting both an act of self-initiated institutional critique and a broader accusation that curating is inherently an undemocratic process. Hüttner played along with this questionable interpretation of what his project might represent, to the point of changing the title he had intended, setting aside his original reference to Beuys and calling the project *I Am a Curator*, suggesting a focus on the individual curator at odds to the *collaborative* nature of the production that was becoming the exhibition. His reasoning for doing this makes clear the extent of his capitulation to marketing tactics.

‘We were toying with a lot of different titles for the show that more explicitly dealt with the complexity of the project, but those titles were not very straight forward, and given the people we wanted to involve, we decided on something that was kind of catchy’ (Hüttner & Wade, 2004, Appendix 1).

That the complexity of the project and its relation to a history of social practice should be evacuated in favour of a ‘catchy’ title is telling. One of the project’s biggest problems arose from one of its greatest strengths; the multiple authorship of the project and the complexity this resulted in. The antagonistic make up of the exhibition and its live characteristics meant that no single person knew what the project was about until it was completed, and even then there was no consensus, as a methodology for such had been avoided. This led to a large reliance on the speculative material provided by the gallery, on the title of the exhibition and on the opinions of Hüttner as its initiator. But, of course the very idea of creating an open field for debate about issues like curatorship is bound to create a forum fraught with misunderstanding and in fighting, and Hüttner’s style of integrating all comers into the project meant not only openness but confusion. In the light of this, Hüttner proved unable to present a clear critical line based on the project’s strengths and made questionable decisions regarding the interpretation of the project.

Perhaps the most problematic of these was that, in spite of its focus on participation and collaboration Hüttner claimed the project *I am Curator* as exclusively his own. The logic for seeing the whole as a conceptual work has already been discussed and assessed, but this appears as a suggestion only in a text written a year after the exhibition and should be seen as a decision that emerged in part as a reaction to the criticism he received during and after the show. In the marketing and in the catalogue Hüttner describes *I Am a Curator* as a “solo-exhibition” a claim he further conditioned by describing it as ‘one project by one artist’ (Hüttner, 2005, p. 9). In the main text of the press release for the exhibition Hüttner is mentioned by name six times. The

text provides an introduction to the project alongside his biographical details, a list of recent exhibitions he has been involved in and a description of his artistic and curatorial focus. In keeping with his assertion of sole authorship, this document followed the format of publicity for a solo show. The difference between recognising his role as initiator and the degree of authorship this denotes, and referring to the exhibition as a solo endeavour is paramount and in this case it is clearly incorrect and misleading. Paul O'Neill, in his piece on the exhibition for *Art Monthly* magazine picks up on this problem:

'In process, practice and structure, it was not a solo exhibition...

Proclaiming authorship in this way means that the work of the artist-curator not only becomes separated from the specific historical, political and cultural conditions within and through which the exhibition was produced, but it also produces a performative act on behalf of the artist-curator as a kind of authoritative speech' (O'Neill, 2004b, p. 9).

O'Neill's assessment is acute, suggesting how dislocated from an accurate representation of working processes such claims are and how such a unreflective approach can only be seen as an attempt at establishing authorship through a display of authority, over and above any feasible claims. This raises the question of why Hüttner felt the need to brand the exhibition in such an egotistical fashion, at the cost of the many others whose projects formed crucial parts of the whole. The very extent of the unsuitability of the term 'solo exhibition' forces an interpretation of this as some kind of power play, with its primary reasoning outside the project itself, possibly based on issues of Hüttner's career or relations between himself and the institution. The method for selecting works adopted by Patrick Bernier, in which he proposed selection in exchange for hospitality, reveals the kudos attached to showing at the Chisenhale and its possible that Hüttner when invited to do a solo exhibition, was reticent to give up the status this awarded him in spite of the fact that the eventual exhibition assumed an entirely different characteristic. The exact reasoning remains unclear but Hüttner remained

unapologetic, reiterating in interview his belief that this was a suitable description of the project.

Concerning my insistence on calling this a solo show, I think that that all worked out very well. There were jokes that were made about me being the 'über-curator'; and hogging the limelight. But I think that everyone felt that there was room for their participation and that their input into the project was recognised and made visible. If anything, I should have probably been a lot firmer about the fact that it was my solo exhibition' (Hüttner & Wade, 2004, Appendix 1).

There is evidence that most of the participants, though puzzled by Hüttner's decision, were satisfied with the terms of their participation and broadly in support of the project's experimental approach. However, the question of recognition and visibility remained a sore point for many, and what Hüttner construed as jokes would appear to be veiled expressions of genuine dissatisfaction with the way in which he authored the project, not least because the first they learned of it was upon receiving the marketing material. Selectors, artists and partners in the design and interpretation were rightly angered by this, and some felt tricked and exploited as Morten Goll describes:

'As for the idea of shared author ship, the show was a joke, since only one name hit the poster... How do you convince 55 artists and 6 curators that they should put their work into your solo show?' (Goll, 2008, Appendix 3).

Goll, whose contribution to the exhibition can be seen as a joke in response to Hüttner's own, also throws some light onto a possible reason for Hüttner's claiming sole authorship in the way he did:

'When asked, he told me that the gallery would not accept a group

show. In my view that would have been a perfect excuse to reject the gallery, or produce an actual solo show' (Goll, 2008, Appendix 3).

Rigby concurs with Goll on this issue, saying that he was under the impression that Hüttner had felt some pressure from the gallery to refer to the show as a solo exhibition. This explanation does however appear to be disingenuous. Ella Gibbs, whose project *Spare Time Job Centre* was shown at the Chisenhale gallery the year before, referred to the project simply as a commission, and was careful to make clear in her marketing of the exhibition:

'Crucially, the project's outcome is determined by the input of *Spare Time Job Centre*'s participants, rather than being a creation of the artist's singular, isolated vision' (Chisenhale Gallery, 2003b).

It is unfeasible to believe that Hüttner was not offered a similar opportunity to make the terms of authorship clear in the gallery's publicity for the show. His decision not to do this reflected poorly on the project's essential pluralism. The critics too found this fact hard to leave alone.

4.2.12 Statistical red-herrings.

Feargal Stapleton, in his dense critique of the project for C magazine, sees Hüttner's proposed focus on artistic intention and interpretation as a red herring, preferring to read Hüttner's over-authoring of the project, in combination with the title as a pointer towards an oppressive agenda.

'The important question for curators is of course: Why have I convinced myself that the aesthetic loop should include me? And the prime question of interpretation is: What is it that I am now looking at? Per Hüttner's manifest answer to the first question is:

Because I see myself as a lord. My answer to the second question is: I'm looking at a game, mutative and feudal, with several tiers of collusion, various opportunities for reward and disappointment, viral in its tendency towards the proliferation of stats (like: Which artist's work got taken out of the box least) and in its potential for international currency. I'm also looking at a bid for curatorial practice as art, and for curatorial supremacy over its subject - arts' disciplines' (Stapleton, 2004, p.41).

Stapleton's observations reinforce the argument that the branding of the project as a solo-exhibition further exasperated the fact that the question of artistic intention is barely touched upon in the project. The Curators of the Day were not given access to the artists, but to a pre-selection of their works, which when framed in Hüttner's universe risked losing a relation to their authors altogether. This is the supremacy he observes, overlooking the evidence of co-production in favour of an analysis of the striking difference between the democratic project advertised and the feudal one revealed in Hüttner's self-promotion. Stapleton concludes by linking the project to exactly that phenomena which it purportedly sought to critique – elitism.

Stapleton also mentions in passing an additional problematic facet of the project; the decision to document the project statistically. The analysis which Rickards and Hüttner applied to the exhibition during its run was reminiscent of a scientific approach, something that links to Hüttner's earlier work. Yet looking at the information gathered it is clear that it added nothing to the project's critical openness, but served instead to focus attention elsewhere. Presenting empirical information about, for example, which of the works was selected most frequently and which of the selectors was most popular with the public, and summarising these figures as 'weekly totals', the project was represented as a series of tawdry competitions; the professionals pitched against the amateurs, the artists against each other, the selectors in a supposed battle of scores. In the light of the earlier observations on the difference between games and play, the scoring of the project in this way was

counterproductive and poorly conceived. Such decisions make it hard to agree with Hüttner when he counters the criticism of *I Am a Curator* and his other projects with a suggestion that judgement is relative, or that the project has been wilfully misunderstood.

‘All three projects have raised a lot of discussion and media attention. Sadly enough these discussions have focused on defining whether the exhibitions were good or bad, successful or a failure. To me this is of little importance. All four judgements are one and the same’ (Hüttner, 2004).

It is the role of the critic to reason and judge, and in his misjudgement of particular elements of the project Hüttner provided them with ample ammunition to attack the project.

In addition to the choice of title, the authoring of the project and the statistical analysis of the show, a problematic aspect of the exhibition for participants and critics alike was the definition of curating that the project appeared to uphold. Paul O’Neill sees as a central flaw of *I Am a Curator* the fact that leaves too many structural questions unanswered.

‘How is the term curator being used in this context when the participants have little power to transform the conceptual structure of the exhibition? What can be done during a single day, the period offered for both installation and exhibition? How many cohesive exhibitions can a curator produce with works by 57 artists already selected? In fact, it was never made clear why any of the works were initially selected or why the project seemed to support the curatorial model of the curator as DJ, mixing and remixing existing cultural forms to produce new compositions, but with the choice of original material set out beforehand’ (O’Neill, 2003b, p.10).

There can be no doubt that the pre-selection of works, the lack of access to the artists and the foreshortening of the time-scale adopted for *I Am a Curator* simplified the act of curating, or that it did so, like all mimetic games, to promote ease and enjoyment of play. O'Neill's critique is based however not only on these limitations themselves, which might easily be observed in most simulated situations that require a suspension of disbelief, but also on the fact that measures were not taken to make transparent the limitations these necessarily represented. At the core of this was Hüttner's decision to focus on the activity of sorting through some work and hanging it in a gallery space; unquestionably a clichéd and inaccurate view of what curators do with their time. Games simplify things, but *I Am a Curator* suffered from a repeated confusion between its status as a game, and its potential for critique of the real activity it thematised. Unlike a board game or a role-playing scenario, *I Am a Curator* naively made claims to changing real-life relations, to democratising existing structures and to empowering individuals. This reveals confusion between the activity of becoming a curator and that of playing curator, making claims for the latter, which may or may not even be possible for the former. This wilful confusion of two distinct activities, appears not to have been carefully enough addressed in the project's framing and consequent marketing, just as it is overlooked in its interpretation.

The project benefits from its conceptual, hence representative, characteristics and from its status as an open multi-authored game, in which possibilities can be enacted regardless of their efficacy. However, beyond its implied critique of institutional hierarchies the activity bore little actual reference to the professional field of curating. This reference was however implied through a whole number of decisions, including the before mentioned choice of title, the naming of particular roles and very importantly, the location of the activity. Huizinga identifies locality as an important factor in conditioning the difference between play and real life, arguing that unlike

real activities, games are not site specific, although they frequently involve imagining a site or simulating one. It is significant that *I Am a Curator* did not inhabit an association free site, but instead populated the real life context for exhibitions and their making. The problem is that the nearer a game comes to inhabiting the space of what it simplistically resembles, the more important it becomes to flag up the terms of the simulation. In the absence of this, participants and observers can come and go with misguided expectations or an inflated opinion of what they have experienced and perhaps more importantly the critical and cultural potential of play over and above real or ordinary life, can be nullified through lack of attention.

In relation to this, a pivotal moment in the exhibition was the incident provoked by Goll and Hamou's contribution *Instructional Video and Uniforms for a Gallery Crew*. The idea of dressing the Gallery Crew up in ridiculous costumes was precisely such a checking mechanism to the slippage between the game and the real. A rupture in the process of administrating to the smooth running of the activities in the gallery, and a moment at which the authority of the institution was stamped on the project in the form of Hannah Rickards defence of particular working methods. Goll and Hamou wanted the crew to be a continual reminder of the fact that everyone was involved in a guided fiction with all the simplifications and shortcomings that entailed. The response of defending the democratic rights of the gallery crew, of course, simultaneously ignored and censored Goll and Hamou's attempt to reveal the illusion on which these were based. Estrangement, Goll argues, is an important element in maintaining a critical distance in such projects.

'...if you want to produce an environment, or a platform, for collaborative process, dialog and participation between people who from the outset are internalized into a highly specific social hierarchy (gallery crew, artists, curators, audience), then you have to make a real effort to actually erase or at least address the nature of that hierarchy in order to eliminate its negative consequences' (Goll, 2008, Appendix 3).

This issue of erasure is particularly interesting because it introduces us to the second pivotal moment in the exhibition; the point at which Hüttner and Rickards decided to change their advice to the Curators of the Day and open up the prescribed framework for participation to the possibility of refusal. In their censure of Goll and Hamous' Brechtian intervention, Hüttner and Rickards initially sought to maintain control over the structure of the exhibition. The inflexibility revealed in this conflict lead them to a moment where they were forced to realise that this structure, which they had intended as participatory, was actually a replication of the standard disciplinary hierarchy found in institutions. This counter-productive logic of seeking to simply simulate the functions of a standard exhibition (selecting, hanging, viewing) and policing any aspects with ambiguous functionality (the ponchos) resulted in the Curators of the Day behaving like mice in an experiment. When Hüttner and Rickard agreed to reprogram the project with a speculative logic, it created the possibility of establishing provisional hierarchies and enacting rupture on a daily basis. Anton Nikolov's contribution, a blank refusal to show works, is suggestive of what potential this opening up of an undefined space for activity held.



Fig.2. *I am a Curator*. The Gallery Crew and Curators of the Day meet to prepare an exhibition. Image courtesy Per Hüttner and Chisenhale Gallery, London.



Fig.3. *I am a Curator*. A member of the Gallery Crew stands by as the Curators of the Day discuss their plans with Per Hüttner. Image courtesy Per Hüttner and Chisenhale Gallery, London.



Fig.4. *I am a Curator*. A visitor views one of the completed exhibitions. Image courtesy Per Hüttner and Chisenhale Gallery, London.



Fig.5. *I am a Curator*. View of an exhibition in the gallery with the Support Structure in the background. Image courtesy Per Hüttner and Chisenhale Gallery, London.

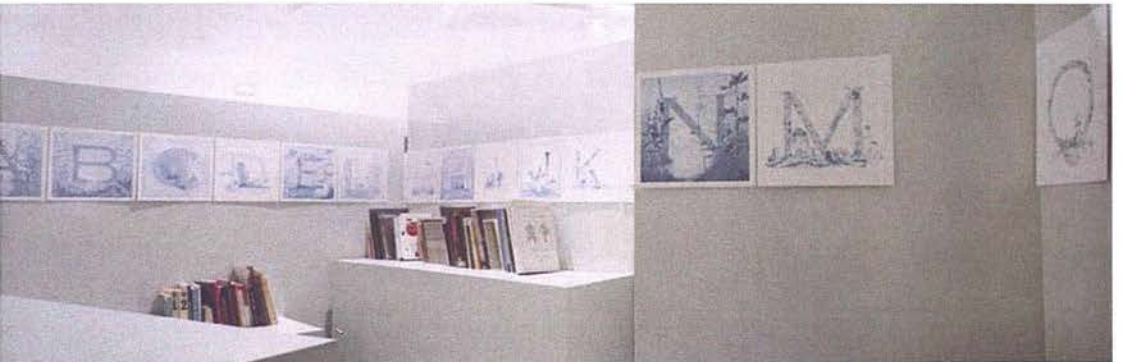


Fig.6. *I am a Curator*. View of an exhibition in the gallery enclosed within the Support Structure. Image courtesy Per Hüttner and Chisenhale Gallery, London.

4.3.1 Local and national political context

As part of a three-year cultural plan outlined in 2000, the city of Aarhus in Denmark proposed the establishment of a contemporary art festival for the city. The idea, put forward by a social democrat politician in the local government, was for an event with international appeal which would ideally take place in the city every three or four years. When the plan was agreed, a sum of 1 million Danish Krone was set aside for the planning and realisation of the first festival. The following year, in the general election, the Social Democrats gave up their position as most powerful party to the centre right party Venstre, who achieved a governing majority by forming a coalition with the right wing Danish People's Party. The election of 2001 was understood as a historically significant turning point in Danish politics, as the social democrats had enjoyed a majority since the 1920s. Venstre came to power after a controversial campaign marked by a focus on freezing taxes on the one hand and imposing stringent restrictions on immigration on the other. The latter policy, instated immediately by the incumbent government, led to international concern about the state of race-relations in Denmark. At the time critique was particularly focused on the poster campaigns of both Venstre and the Danish People's Party in the lead up to the election, which linked the presence of immigrants, in particular Muslims, with criminality and lawlessness.

The change in government did not effect the cultural plan for Aarhus and in 2002 a variety of people involved in the cultural life of the city met to discuss informally what shape a contemporary art festival might take and how it might be delivered. Helen Lykke-Møller, at that time director of the Aarhus Art Building, described this first meeting as a brainstorming session and noted that the central question was one of what could be done with the modest budget set aside for the project. The artist, critic and independent curator Trine Rytter Andersen was conducting research for the Aarhus Art

Building and she also attended the meeting, interested by the fact that the festival idea had been left unvisited for two years despite the considerable sum of money being made available. Her impression of the first meeting was that neither the Aarhus Art Building nor the Kulturhus Aarhus, the other venue in the city who might potentially have overseen the festival, were interested in taking on the responsibility alone. The main idea raised in the meeting was that the funds might be used for a sculpture exhibition in the public space along the coastline between the harbour and the Art Museum, located south of the city centre. A decision was also made to form a steering committee to oversee the development of the *Aarhus Festival of Contemporary Art*. Chaired by Lykke-Møller the committee was made up of six people including herself and Bjarne Bækgaard from the business sector, Pia Buchardt from the Kulturhus Aarhus, Anna Krogh from the ARoS Art Museum in Aarhus, Inge-Lise Ravn from the artist's association, and Lena Øvig from the regional council. After the initial brainstorming meeting Andersen expressed an interest in being further involved in the planning of the festival and one of the committee's first decision was to commission her to conduct six months of research into what form the festival might take.

4.3.2 Identifying a framework

As a key figure in the development of the festival it is important to look at Trine Rytter Andersen's background in socially engaged art, as this unquestionably influenced the development of the project from a sculpture project to the more overtly political exhibition that eventually took place. She initially trained in classical drawing and sculpture at the Jutland Academy of Fine Arts in Aarhus. After her graduation she moved away from objects and images and developed a practice combining conceptual and performance-based strategies. These were explored in collaboration with Tina Lynge and Grethe Aagaard, with whom she made works as the artists group Artillery. The group's work sought to make people aware of how power structures function in daily life, through participatory events and actions conducted in the public space. Her work dealt almost exclusively with the city of Aarhus

where she was based and from 1998 Andersen also curated various events, mostly within the frame of artist-run spaces and initiatives in the city. These projects sought to explore similar territory to her work with Artillery as explained in her biographical note.

‘As a curator, Andersen investigates positions that establish and emphasize a play between art and politics. Art is able to subvert ingrained patterns of expectation usually based on either/or solutions by posing new questions and unveiling new answers, which in turn inspire to different actions. Andersen's strategy is not an attempt to subordinate art to politics or vice versa, but to reflect the two different principles of meaning by bringing them into play with one another without reducing the one to the other’ (Minority Report, 2004).

Although her interest in putting herself forward as a coordinator and potential curator of the first festival was undoubtedly influenced by her wish to continue work of this kind, there is evidence that she did not immediately see the festival as an opportunity for developing her own work and ideas. In an interview she describes how her initial response to the commission was to seek more information about the framework for the potential festival with the aim of identifying the stakeholders in the idea and gathering opinion from these constituencies who would eventually stand to gain or lose from the event. A secondary aim of this was to understand to what extent she could ally herself with interested parties and to consider how much room there was for the development of a critical project. She described this as a process of identifying the framework, gaining access to it and widening it.

She began her research by meeting with the committee of politicians responsible for culture in Aarhus and also with a selection of people involved in art in the region, asking both groups about their expectations of the festival. In her mind the goal of drawing attention to Aarhus could be seen as a unifying concern for both politicians and arts professionals alike. However,

she observed that there was little consensus over the type of art festival that might do this. While noting that there were divisions in opinion both between the groups themselves and internally, amongst the various members of the groups, she identified two ideas that emerged from her talks.

‘The politicians had a modernist idea where all the artists in the city would get dressed up and gather to build a kind of Monmartre village, where the people of the city would come together to watch the artists work and learn sketching, painting and drawing’ (Andersen, 2006, Appendix 5).

The arts professionals favoured an event with a less local focus and the specific appeal to bring visitors from outside Denmark. In Andersen’s view, ‘the others saw art and culture as important primarily as a form of marketing and wanted to do something on an international scale’ (Andersen, 2006, Appendix 5).

Through these meetings she saw a clear conflict in interest between the two main constituencies who had an interest in influencing the festival’s form and content; between those who wanted an art-themed event for a general public including the city’s tourists and those who wanted a quality contemporary art event capable of attracting an international art audience. Andersen openly critiqued the idea of the artist’s village, arguing against it on two fronts. Firstly, she reminded the politicians that the funds were earmarked for a festival of contemporary art, and pointed out that few contemporary artists would be willing to represent themselves or their work in the way suggested. Secondly she argued that such an event would do nothing to attract international visitors to Aarhus or even from other parts of Denmark. Aware that there was no specific venue for the project and still in mind of the steering committee’s interest in an outdoor sculpture festival, Andersen began to think of a middle way that incorporated not only the opinions of those she had met with, but also the social concerns evident in her previous art and curatorial work. She proposed to the politicians and the art

professionals that the success of the project would rest on the support of the local people and the use of their space, the city itself, that it should ideally take the form of a festival of art in the public space and that it should involve international contemporary artists of a high standing.

4.3.3 The curatorial team

During these preliminary meetings Andersen was also considering how best to select a curatorial team for the project. She made clear in the interview that from the outset she saw herself as part of any eventual curatorial team, but that she had no illusions about curating the festival alone. It is unclear if the steering committee understood her as a potential curator of the project, as the commission to research for the festival was vaguely defined. Lykke-Møller pointed out that in her eyes Andersen was at first perceived by the committee as a coordinator 'responsible for the organisation, fundraising and sponsoring' (Lykke-Møller, 2006, Appendix 6). The fact that her role in curating the project had not been overtly discussed and agreed by the group in advance may also have influenced Andersen's decision to build a curatorial team within which she had a voice. The committee were apparently happy with this model and no questions were raised about her presence within it as co-curator. Andersen had a free hand in selecting her co-curators and contacted the artist Kirsten Dufour and independent curators Anja Raithel and Tone O. Nielsen, calling a meeting in November of 2002 at which she proposed that they work together on the festival. The three invited co-curators shared with Andersen an interest in the relationship between art and politics, and they had all developed artistic and curatorial projects based on this interest. Although adopting a variety of approaches the curatorial team were also joined by their favouring of collaborative work, involvement with artist-run initiatives and, to a greater or lesser extent, engagement in political activism.

Kirsten Dufour joined with fellow students at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen in 1968 to form the group KanonKlubben, which lobbied

successfully for a change in teaching methods at the school, resulting in the establishment of open discussion groups lead by the students themselves. The group had a high proportion of women and Dufour's work of that period has been described as collaborative and feminist, a good example being her involvement with six other women in the performance installation *Damebillider* in 1970, in which they created and occupied environments for communal living and working. Her work, writing and teaching maintained a political focus and explored variously issues of gender inequality, anti-war protest, and critical use of the public space. In 2001 she co-founded the group YNKB – Outer Noerrebro Cultural Bureau a collaborative arts organisation committed to exploring art and creativity with the inhabitants, many of them immigrants, of one of the most densely populated parts of Copenhagen. The group eventually developed a work for the *Aarhus Festival of Contemporary Art* entitled *The Future of Denmark* which they produced in collaboration with students at Aarhus Municipal Language Centre.

Anja Raithel brought local knowledge to the group as a resident of Aarhus, who since 1999 had been involved with eight other artists and theoreticians in the running of the alternative space rum46. An art historian with an MA from the city's University her curatorial work for rum46 included producing the interdisciplinary project *Feast/Hospitality* over the period of a year (December 2002- December 2003). This project, which was in preparation when Andersen first brought the curatorial group together, centred on the idea of creating a forum for equal exchange between artists, theoreticians and audience members. The goal for such exchange Raithel herself explained:

'Feast/Hospitality focuses on the reciprocal relation between host and guest, pointing to the construction of 'us and them' in an attempt to show that these constructions exist in a relation of interdependence, which constantly needs to be re-evaluated and redefined. Within this process of re-evaluation and redefinition opens up the possibility for actions that are able to counter the

stereotypical models of exclusion and inclusion fostered by intolerance' (Minority Report, 2004).

Tone O. Nielsen had recently returned to Denmark from the United States where she had completed her MA studies at the UCLA's Critical and Curatorial Studies Program. Her thesis took the form of an exhibition examining the state of activism in Los Angeles, entitled *Democracy When: Activist Strategizing in Los Angeles*. The project was presented at Los Angeles Contemporary exhibitions and in other sites around the city between the fourth of May and the fifteenth of June, 2002 and combined an exhibition of works and documentation with a program of live events which favoured repeated visits, as the project's website explains.

'Democracy When? is best described as a collective think tank for the exchange and rethinking of activist strategies and practices. The exhibition brings together thirty-five artists and artists' collectives, activists and organizers, community organizations and activist groups, academics and theoreticians from greater Los Angeles to collectively explore a number of problematics that political, social, and cultural activism is faced with today. Audiences are invited to take part in this exploration by visiting the exhibition frequently and participating in the projects, discussions, actions, interventions, events, and performances that it stages during its six-week exhibition period.' (Democracy When, 2006).

At the November meeting Andersen described the situation; the political decision, the money made available and the opinions of the steering committee, the cultural politicians and the arts professionals she had spoken with. She appears to have approached the meeting much like the others she had already organised, seeking out the opinions of the invited parties rather than bringing a concept of her own. In this sense Andersen approached the choice of curators more as a mediator or commissioner than a collaborator.

The extent of this role is evident in Andersen's own memories of why she invited certain individuals to co-curate, in particular Tone O. Nielsen, of whom she remarked: 'Tone had just returned to Denmark and I had been reading her articles. I thought it would be interesting to bring her school of thought and mindset to Denmark' (Andersen, 2006, Appendix 5).

Nielsen received Andersen's invitation to collaborate on the festival shortly after her return to Denmark from the U.S.A; a move necessitated not by choice but by visa problems. Comments in the accompanying literature to her Los Angeles project (Democracy When, 2006), show that even from a distance she was aware and critical of the restrictive immigration policies of Venstre and the Danish People's Party. Upon her return she became increasingly concerned not only by what these restrictions meant for the immigrant populations of her home country but also by what she saw as an 'appalling' level of discourse about the topic of immigration and refugee status in Denmark (Nielsen, 2006, Appendix 4). She was particularly 'upset' by the tone of media coverage and the content of political posters and campaign brochures, which she saw as overtly racist. Her concerns were compounded not only by her perception that significant changes had occurred in the five years she had been away but also by her observation of how few people seemed interested in addressing these changes. It is clear that these strong opinions and the emotions that she attached to them were influential in the first meeting, and instrumental in the decisions made there.

Nielsen remembered the invitation as initially very vague, with no suggestion from Andersen whether the people invited were to form a team together as co-curators, to consult or perhaps to be a long-list from which one or two might be selected. The steering committee's interest in site-specific sculpture on the coast appears to have excited none of the invited co-curators and the meeting only really gained momentum when the issue of a thematic focus for the festival was broached; something that Nielsen, in an interview on the subject, recalls initiating.

‘I said at that meeting that the only thing I was interested in, and I would do it on my own or within this forum, was addressing this increase in racism in Denmark’ (Nielsen, 2006, Appendix 4).

Raithel, Dufour and Andersen all emphatically added their support for the idea and the rest of the meeting was spent sketching out what form the project might take. There is a strong argument to be made that the proposal could equally have come from either Dufour or Raithel, as at that time the former was working closely with immigrant communities in Copenhagen and the latter preparing a project that explicitly looked at intolerance in Aarhus. In a similar line Andersen’s role in bringing the three together should not be underestimated, though she personally claims to have convened the curatorial group without a specific theme in mind, the practices of the people she invited point towards an interest in creating a particular kind of event. Regardless of this conjecture, she remembered being part of the consensus once the focus had been suggested.

‘When the curatorial group met we asked ourselves “what is the subject here?” We were all clear; “This is going to be about colonialism and racism in the Danish political context absolutely no discussion.” We were interested in how the multicultural society was developing, how we could discuss this with an exhibition and how we could engage inhabitants in the discussion in an open way’ (Andersen, 2006, Appendix 5).

4.3.4 *Early negotiations*

Agreeing to work together as a curatorial group the four compiled the first in a series of proposals for the project under the working title *Something is Rotten in the State of Denmark*; a quotation from Shakespeare’s tragic protagonist Hamlet. Andersen presented this proposal to the steering committee. Helen Lykke-Møller maintained in an interview that the group

found the proposal interesting, recognised the curators' enthusiasm and having foreknowledge of their previous projects were not altogether surprised by the change in direction the concept indicated. She also admitted that they were 'nervous' (Lykke-Møller, 2006, Appendix 6) about brokering a project of a sensitive political nature with the politicians who had agreed to pay for it. The committee were also unhappy with the title, which they felt was overly negative and would keep potential visitors away. Despite these factors, which Lykke-Møller describes as minor details, the steering committee essentially agreed to the core idea of the project and commissioned the curatorial team to work further on it. As a condition though they requested some changes to the written concept and a change of title. In the ensuing months two rewrites appeared before a final draft was accepted and the title *Minority Report: Challenging Intolerance in Contemporary Denmark* agreed upon.

An interim concept that emerged as a rewrite by Nielsen was entitled *Deconstructing Racism* and it extended the scope of the first concept making an explicit link between the rise in racist hyperbole in Denmark and the shift of political power to the centre right; a connection which she was particularly eager to make. According to Nielsen this approach led to conflict with the steering committee and a rift in intention between herself and Anja Raithel.

'We replaced *Something is Rotten in the State of Denmark* with *Deconstructing Racism* and I wrote an exhibition proposal with this title strongly linking the increasing racism to recent developments in Danish politics. The steering committee freaked out and said that it was presented as a fact and not as a thesis, that they would not go along with this and that we had to question whether racism was really increasing to begin with. The first confrontation within the curatorial group came about then, when the steering committee asked us whether it wasn't more constructive to focus on notions of tolerance and hospitality. Anja had been involved in an exhibition in Aarhus on the topic of hospitality and was open to this idea, but I said 'no way we can't

have another Christian, ideologically informed project, we have to look at this as a construction'. But, I was interested in posing it as a thesis and eventually we introduced very carefully the idea that there are signs that either racism is increasing, or that racism is more clearly expressed nowadays' (Nielsen, 2006, Appendix 4).

The incident reveals how Nielsen often took the lead in the development of the curatorial approach to the project and insisted on the implementation of specific parts of her curatorial methodology regardless of the views of her colleagues. Her capitulation to the steering committee's request for a more dialogical approach to the subject matter also reveals her willingness to accept a level of compromise, and even in this case recognise why the idea of presenting a thesis rather than a fact might prove more interesting to participants and public alike. Andersen appears to have played an important role in mediating a concept that all parties were in the end willing to support. Lykke-Møller described in interview the chain of communication, by which the steering committee members and Andersen frequently met with the cultural politicians to clarify the project.

'I participated in many of the meetings with the cultural committee and we discussed the project until Trine felt comfortable with the conditions. It was not difficult to negotiate the project, but we really wanted them to understand what the project was. It is difficult to get ideas like this into politicians' heads, you don't want to cause them to be unnecessarily nervous, but you want them to understand what it is about and that's a fine line to walk' (Lykke-Møller, 2006, Appendix 6).

Andersen was a spokesperson for the curatorial team at these meetings, and Lykke-Møller suggested that the aim was to get to a stage where she was comfortable, and where the politicians' requests were acceptable to the curatorial group. In turn, she had to impress on the curatorial team the

validity of these requests and broker compromises; this mediator role later extended to her work with the press and with funders and sponsors.

Agreement by all on the title *Minority Report: Challenging Intolerance in Contemporary Denmark* also marked consent for a concept that walked a similarly fine line between accusing the neo-liberal and centre-right coalition of active encouragement of racism and posing an open question about such connections and their consequences. In a reflection of this partial softening of the argumentation favoured by Nielsen, the term racism was dropped from the title to be replaced with intolerance. This softening should only be understood as partial because the eventual title and the concept that stood behind it remained in keeping with her wishes; intolerance and xenophobia were presented as fact, and the project as a challenge to them. Prominent in the final concept was the presentation of the argument that intolerance is not an inherent human characteristic, but a social construction and as such something 'learned'. This clearly left the door open for a critique of the social and political conditions that exasperate racism, but also allowed for debate on how best to progress with 'alternative models for meaningful co-existence' (Minority Report, 2004) - the latter reminiscent of the focus of Raithel's project on hospitality. The title *Minority Report* was borrowed from a science fiction novel by Philip K Dick popularised by Steven Spielberg's film adaptation released in 2002. On the surface the title worked as a kind of short hand for the project's function as a form of report on the issue of minority, with the added benefit of being catchy and in the public eye at the time. On a deeper level there are interesting parallels between the exhibition and the plot of the novel and film, in which the police use a group of clairvoyants to apprehend people who are considering breaking the law. Nielsen explained the connection:

'The reason we eventually chose the title *Minority Report*, which references Philip K Dick's novel, is that in it he describes a state where you can condemn somebody who hasn't even committed a crime. I think that racism functions the same way and that

immigrants are condemned before having been given a chance to explain the terms of their own subjectivity' (Nielsen, 2006, Appendix 4).

4.3.5 Three strategies

Despite changes to the title and debate within the group about the project's line of enquiry, during their early exchanges the curatorial group agreed on three clear strategies, all of which were to endure the concept stage and become part of the eventual project. The first of these was the decision that any approach to the topic should be multidisciplinary. This manifested itself in the decision to represent and include not only the practices of visual artists, but also community organisations, theorists, activists and numerous other sources of cultural and socio-political material relevant to the issues being explored. The second strategy was that they utilise a number of sites in Aarhus offering different exhibition experiences and privileging different kinds of contribution; these they termed 'Stations'. Complimentary projects and interventions in the public space were also planned and these were termed 'Satellites'.

The first Station was the Equestrian Hall, a former military riding arena that had been converted into a cultural centre. The hall was intended as a first stop for visitors, a hub for introducing the activities and experiences offered in the festival and 'the central nervous system of the exhibition' (Minority Report, 2004). It housed an information centre where visitors could access practical information about the festival alongside extensive archival material on the artists and community groups involved. It also contained a zone where the debates were held, a stage for the musical contributions, performances and stand-up comedy, several lounge areas, a café and a play area for children. Several art works were made specifically for the space and alongside existing works they interspersed or formed part of the interpretational structure and extended to the outside of the building. The second station was the Aarhus Art Building, the publicly run art centre directed by Helen Lykke-

Møller, which contained a formally more traditional exhibition of historical and contemporary work from national and international artists on the topics of intolerance and coexistence. The third station was the small alternative movie theatre called East Of Eden, which showed a curated program of documentaries, feature films and art videos during the festival. The fourth station was a publication that the curators developed as 'a two-dimensional exhibition space for participants working with text or montage specifically (Minority Report, 2004). It served as an extension of the exhibition rather than a documentary catalogue or handbook to the festival. Leaflets serving this purpose were available free of charge at the Equestrian hall.

The third strategy, alongside the focus on multidisciplinary and the decision to inhabit multiple venues and formats was a clear wish to engage international participants. This was eventually reflected in the choice of invited artists, activist groups, theoreticians and speakers and was decided upon as a method of extending debate beyond the national context while retaining, through its situation in Aarhus, a commentary on the Danish situation:

'Denmark becomes a 'case study' for *Minority Report*, opening up the possibility for an examination of a phenomenon that is not restricted to Denmark solely, but visible in a large number of other European countries' (Minority Report, 2004).

4.3.6 Research, conflict and the clarification of roles.

Following their initial meeting the curators progressed together with their research and development of the project reaching joint decisions on the concept, structure, and methodology. Work on the list of participants was carried out in a similarly collaborative fashion and the agreed framework of stations and satellites served as a structural guide for considering which participants should be asked to provide which content for the exhibition.

Andersen noted how this was carried out with a focus on balancing the different elements within the project.

‘We researched such a stack of people and discussed back and forth, putting them together in relation to what we had in mind - we wanted a historical view, we wanted an international view, we wanted a gender balance, we wanted a balance of political views. We sat for such a long time holding the artists up against one another, considering which work we were interested in and asking which work spoke to which other, and how the groups and talks would work together. It was like making a bouquet of flowers, adding and subtracting until we had something that was structured, balanced and organised. From the beginning we had the idea of the stations and the satellites fixed and often it was a case of fitting the artists into these blocks and the dynamics they represented’ (Andersen, 2006, Appendix 5).

At the same time the curators were meeting with numerous formal and informal immigrant groups operating both on a political and a community or social level. In a similar fashion to their exchange with the invited artists the curators favoured transparency about the project’s aims and methodology while often proposing a specific way in which the group could take part. The research period also involved the curators reading and discussing relevant theoretical and sociological texts about the subject matter.

The concept period, including the selection of participants, lasted a year and by November 2003 the group had agreed on a list of 116 artists, groups and theoreticians a high proportion of whom were to produce new work, projects or texts for the festival. The curatorial group had also used the time to pull together a consultancy group made up of important figures dealing with the issue of immigration within the Danish context. This group met several times in 2004 to reflect upon the progress of the project and advise the curators. The process of working in parallel on a joint project required a large amount

of communication and negotiation between the curators and by November 2003, although the concept stage had been satisfactorily completed, the group was tired and the practicalities of the working model that they had adopted came under question. Nielsen voiced her concerns on two specific problems she felt needed solving. The first of these was the necessity for a clear division of responsibility amongst the curatorial team as they entered the production phase of the project, and the second the need for a distinction to be drawn between the administration of the exhibition *Minority Report* and that of the *Aarhus Festival of Contemporary Art* that carried it. Reflecting on the skills and weaknesses that had been exposed during the first stage of the project, Nielsen proposed that Andersen assumed responsibility for the coordination of the festival, along with the steering committee, and that she become chief curator of *Minority Report*. There is evidence that this was more a demand than a proposal and Andersen recalled that the other curators capitulated to Nielsen's demands despite opposition to them. The group were in agreement that incidences of doubling up on work and miscommunication had led to the research period being unnecessarily labour intensive, but Andersen maintained that she, Dufour and Raithel gave Nielsen the lead-role as much to avoid her leaving the project than as a perceived solution to these problems.

By all accounts the clarification of roles allowed the curatorial team to make decisions more quickly and to meet less frequently. Responsibility for specific aspects of the project production, for example shipping of works, were allocated to single members of the team of four, allowing them to move forward on practical issues without consulting the others. As chief curator Nielsen had the final say on the management of practical and content related aspects, so at points of disagreement a solution was quickly reached. One such disagreement concerned the issue of fundraising and the relationship between the ethics of the project and those of the sponsors invited to support it. Andersen alone undertook the work of seeking sponsorship and support in kind for the project, engaging a local communications company she created and distributed a promotional booklet that she described a '...smart and slick,

but also provocative - a response to spending a lot of time on the Internet, researching the values of the companies and trying to connect to these' (Andersen, 2006, Appendix 5).

Andersen described how she used the questions raised in the brochure to enter into a dialogue with the companies she approached. The majority of those she met with, including the home-furnishing company Ikea and the Aarhus based meat product company Danish Crown, employed people of non-Danish origin as a significant percentage of their workforce. Andersen's approach was to engage the companies as partners and encourage them to use the festival to present and discuss the importance of immigrant populations to their business.

'I wanted the sponsors to participate in Minority Report, I wanted them to make statements, I wanted them to show themselves in the equestrian hall, I wanted them to participate in the debates, and to say how they saw their responsibilities as employers' (Andersen, 2006, Appendix 5).

In this way Andersen saw the sponsorship of the project as an extension of its dialogical character, and the companies as a further voice within the project alongside the artists, immigrant groups, theoreticians and members of the public. Her endeavours eventually raised around 100,000 Danish Krone in financial contributions and a further million Krone as support in kind, in total around one fifth of the overall budget. Andersen's approach attracted several main sponsors, who saw themselves as aligned with the ideals of the project. Ikea's outspoken policies on promoting the integration of its workers sat well with the project and they became a major sponsor while another company supported the project with the equivalent of 270,000 Krone in video equipment and services.

There was however division in the curatorial team regarding sponsorship. Tone O Nielsen maintained that only companies with a proven ethical record

in employing foreign workers should be approached. Behind this point of view lay her conviction that *Minority Report* should take into account the political connotations of the funding it used, and not allow itself to be used as a vehicle for companies with poor ethical records to project an artificially clean face to the public. Andersen on the other hand argued for approaching all companies and entering into a dialogue with them whatever their standing. She believed that this process made companies aware of the nature of their practices and held the possibility of encouraging them, where necessary, to consider changing these. Additionally Andersen saw the issue of sponsorship in a practical light arguing that discounting potential sources of revenue was unwise considering the ambitious project they wished to realise and the urgent need for funds and materials to support their vision. It appears that the dispute settled itself, as it was exclusively the companies with a positive record of working with immigrants who chose to sponsor the project. Andersen described how during discussions with companies where immigrants were primarily seen as a source of cheap labour and where no schemes for self organisation, language classes or help with integration were provided, the project was met with suspicion and sponsorship was not forthcoming.

4.3.7 Towards publicness

During the preparatory stages the curatorial team and the steering committee reached a decision to open the project to the public for a period of a month, from September the 25th to October the 24th 2004. The length of the festival was decided upon with a number of factors in mind. The booking of multiple venues simultaneously, the cost related issue of staffing the exhibition and the wish to plan an intense program of events all favoured a shorter timescale for the event than is normal for a large-scale art exhibition. Nielsen described how the curatorial team approached the festival character of the project, with an interest in the possibility of capturing visitors' attention with a range of experiences, for a shorter but more concentrated period of time:

‘We were also interested in having an intense and in-your-face quality to the timing of the event, really like a festival, getting drunk for five weeks in Munich and that’s it. Buy one ticket and you can see all this artwork, view all these films, hear all this music, enjoy this stand up comedy, hang out and discuss for a month. Take some time out of your diary and dig into this’ (Nielsen, 2006, Appendix 4).

This hoped for intensity was reflected in the deliberate focus on live content; on the daily debates and discussions on the one hand and the incorporation of performance, stand-up comedy and music on the other. The ticketing of the project, as part of which one-month and three-day passes were sold, aimed to encourage visits of at least a full day and ideally a longer engagement with the various activities and experiences on offer. Other aspects of the exhibition design actively facilitated prolonged visits; most notably the lounge, café and children’s play zones at the equestrian hall.

From the outset the curatorial team saw the duration of the project being extended by the publication, which they named as the fourth station of the project. This extension was both in terms of the time taken by the public to read the texts and look at the images in the book and the fact that the fourth station remained open, while the others closed. The book could be endlessly revisited in the future. Both Nielsen and Andersen talked of the texts and images within the publication as constituents of the project, on a par with the works displayed and views aired at the other stations. They understood that not every visitor was likely to buy the book, printing 2000 copies, the majority of which sold over the relatively short duration of the project. As Andersen explained the book, and its symbolic integration as a station stood in for what the curators perceived as a lack of reliable printed information on the issue of intolerance and on a broader level politics.

‘We were aiming at making people more reflective and less automatic in their response, asking them to think more and to try

to see things from different angles. I believe we staged this very clearly and as such we were very direct and very open. The book represents a particular way of doing this, although it is perhaps idealistic to expect people to go home from the exhibition and read the book, but it stood in for our wishes. We all felt that the way people discuss politics today has to be on a more informed level' (Andersen, 2006, Appendix 5).

Stemming from the curators' opinions that a fruitful discussion can only take place when people are suitably informed, the book can be seen as a reaction to the right wing press and in particular the tabloid newspapers, which appeared to have a monopoly on describing and presenting a picture of the situation in Denmark at that time. Nielsen mentioned how, on her return from the United States, the approach and terminology adopted by Danish journalists was one of the first indicators for her that the discourse about immigration was in a state of imbalance. This reaction to textual information was important in defining her wish to present other points of view to the one-sided and arguably racist opinions that appeared in the press at that time. The book, as a collection of literary, political and academic texts was a natural extension of these wishes.

It was a similar impulse to intervene in public discourse that inspired the curators' decision to commission new works for the public space around Aarhus as part of *Minority Report*. These site-specific art projects included audio and video works, performative actions, sculptural works, banners, flags, wall paintings, posters and stickers. Venues for these included a public square, the main street, billboard hoardings and a public toilet. In addition to these, several of the satellites took the form of small exhibitions in the semi-public spaces provided by a language centre, and a provisional display space in a shopping centre which were open during selected exhibition hours. The satellites were strategically placed in quarters of the town with particular ethnic profiles. Nielsen described them as 'intervening into white and immigrant ghettos' (Nielsen, 2006, Appendix 4) and suggested that the idea

was to draw attention and make visible this duality. These works, through their positioning, engaged a much broader audience than the indoor parts of the exhibition. They also functioned as a form of marketing, drawing attention to the exhibition project and provoking debate about its principle themes. As is often the case when art leaves the institution for the public space, the satellites also provoked complaints, vandalism and censorship, which in turn attracted media attention and commentary.

The press coverage for the festival can be divided in various ways, on the one hand between the local and the national press and on the other between art and news coverage. In total there were 166 features, articles and review published about *Minority Report*, the great majority of which came from Aarhus based newspaper radio and television. The event also attracted considerable national press interest including Denmark's largest broadsheet and tabloid newspapers that covered the event in their culture pages. The exhibition also received some coverage from the national and international art press, including a mention in *Artforum* by artist Olafur Eliasson (Eliasson, 2004) and a feature by the critic Dan Jönsson for the art pages of the Swedish daily *Dagens Nyheter* (Jönsson, 2004).

4.3.8 Multiplicity of spaces, formats and experiences

A particularly visible aspect of this project was how participants were, for the most part involved in a series of different capacities, their work distributed between different settings of the Aarhus Art Building, the Equestrian Hall, the public space, the film program and the publication. A good example of this was Asa Sonjasdotter's contribution to the project. The main part of the work shown by the Swedish artist based in Copenhagen evolved from her collaboration with a group of sixteen schoolchildren from Class 6.C, Radmansgade School in Copenhagen. For the work *With Love from 6.C* the children designed postcards in close discussion with Sonjasdotter, their teacher, Tone O Nielsen and a graphic designer. These highly individual cards were sent out to family, friends, celebrities and prominent people

worldwide, according to the wishes of the children. The diverse collection of cards and destinations mapped the aspirations and interests of the ethnically mixed group, who in their active and communicative gesture create a cartographic image suggestive of the international outlook of Denmark's future citizenry. The work was principally exhibited in the Equestrian Hall where the postcards could be viewed on a low table and their international destinations explored on a floor mounted world map, which visitors were invited to walk and sit on. In addition Sonjasdotter lead two postcard workshops with Aarhus based schoolchildren during the exhibition and visited with schoolchildren from 6.C as part of 'Children's Culture Day' an event in the Equestrian Hall. Her final contribution was a carpet work entitled *A Life = A Life*, produced in collaboration with the Afghanistani artist Asif Mufeed. The woven rug, which was produced as a special edition by a Danish carpet manufacturer, simulates classic Afghan design but includes depictions of Mufeed's life as a refugee, seeking asylum in Scandinavia.

The work *A Life = A Life* was shown in the white-cube context of the Aarhus Art Building alongside a selection of drawings by Mufeed entitled *The Chair*; a series of caricatures of himself and other asylum seekers seated in various holding centres while awaiting news of whether their requests for residency have been accepted or denied. In keeping with the museum-like context, the majority of positions at the Aarhus Art Building were artistic, although many explored or adopted visual strategies also employed in activism or related to the methodologies of community work. Equally many of the works were the final results of lengthy socially engaged processes. In the case of *With Love from 6.C* for example, the work underwent a process of engaging two levels of participant-audience before being displayed in Aarhus; the sixteen children in the class and the many recipients of the postcards. One of the exceptions to the predominantly artistic contributions at Station 2 was the information point for the activist group Kein Mensch Ist Illegal whose activities focus on the questionable ethics of a rule of law declaring individuals illegal on the basis of their country of origin. The interactive computer station and wall display provided by the group documented their campaign against the

Lufthansa Corporation, regarding the German airline company's involvement in the forced repatriation of illegal immigrants. The campaign entitled *Deportation.Class* was triggered by the killing of a Sudanese refugee by police escorts on board a Lufthansa flight from Frankfurt to Cairo. The display documented various parts of the campaign, including an action where members of the group posed as employees of an advertising agency distributing dummy leaflets in Hamburg airport as a supposed promotion of a 'deportation class' on Lufthansa flights. The company went public in 2000 to condemn the campaign while continuing to assist with deportations.

Station 2 was also the primary site where the curators sought to connect contemporary works to a longer history of engagement in questions of race and intolerance by artists. They also used the space to show the largest selection of work from outside Denmark with arguably the highest profile international artists in the exhibition. These included for example four works by the African-American artist Adrian Piper dating from the 1970s and 1980s. Amongst these they exhibited the series of oil crayon drawings on black and white photographs entitled *The Mythic Being: I Embody Everything You Most Hate and Fear*, 1975. The works depict the artist in disguise as a potential male alter-ego, with an afro wig, cigarette, moustache, round rimmed glasses. In the images, she crayons in thought bubbles rising from her character's head. The works emerged as a response to experiences gathered during a public performance in which she walked in her disguise through a white neighbourhood and observed the uncertainty with which her stereotypical character was greeted. The title is taken from one of the images where she pencils in 'I embody everything you most hate and fear' as the thought of the protagonist of the images who she names the 'Mythic Being'. Also on display were new works by the veteran Native American artist Jimmie Durham, both produced in collaboration with the younger Danish artist Thorbjørn Reuter Christiansen. *The 13th Space Warning Squadron* a mixed media installation exhibited in Station 2 provided impressions of the US early warning system base in the Northernmost region of Greenland. The

base occupies the former site of the Inuit settlement of Thule. In 1953 its residents were forcibly removed to the town of Qaanaaq some 130km away.

Piper and Durham are internationally recognised senior figures in contemporary art, and as such they appear to remind the viewer of the rich history of artists addressing the topic of intolerance. In addition to this their selection seems also to have been a way of introducing moments in history from around the globe which may have been relevant to the situation in contemporary Denmark; whether that be the experience of the African American male in 1970s New York, or the evicted Inuits whose sense of belonging was sacrificed to the spectre of the burgeoning cold war. A further example of such an inclusion was the presentation of the Indian artist and filmmaker Nalini Malani's video play *Hamletmachine* which borrows from Heiner Müller's play of the same name for 1977 and explicitly addresses the rise of Hindu fundamentalism in India which peaked with the violent destruction of the Babri Masjid Mosque in 1992 and the ensuing swathe of violent and murderous attacks on Mumbai's Muslim minorities by Hindu fundamentalists. There is a sense in the selection of such works which detail histories of violence, prejudice and fear that the curators were building a field of references to suggest the dangers of complacency in the face of such developments. The works in the Aarhus Art Building sought to raise awareness through attention to historical example and extend the scope of this by looking at intolerance as a global and interconnected phenomenon rather than a singular, localised problem.

Though for the most part very serious in tone the exhibition played creatively and at times humorously with what it might mean to imagine things differently, the beginning perhaps of what the curators described as 'preparing the way for alternative models for meaningful co-existence' (Minority Report, 2004). In this respect amongst the more playful positions shown in the Aarhus Art Building was Wong Hoy Cheong's mixed media installation *Re:Looking* in which he stages a scenario from an alternative, imagined present day. In a mock up of a colonial style living room the public

were invited to sit on comfortable period sofas and view a documentary on the television. The entirely fictional report assembled by the artist examines the history of the Malaysian colonisation of Austria and its legacy for the people of both countries. With the production values one would associate with an authentic documentary, the programme follows the story from the discovery of Austria by Malaysian seamen, to the powerful colonial expansion favoured by the Malaysian royal family and the present day lives of the Austrian *guest-workers* employed as cleaning staff and taxi-drivers in Malaysia. The work encourages empathy and reflection through the implication of a reversal of roles, and adds to this by fastidiously drawing out the fiction with credible if historically impossible details. Hamayun Latif Butt adopted a similar strategy of effecting a powerful statement through fiction and reversal in his wall painting created in collaboration with the artist group SUPERFLEX. The collaborators painted the words INGEN MINORITETER in large black capital letters on the outside of the Aarhus Art Building. The term translates as simply NO MINORITIES. The work plays with an ironic reversal of what at first appears to be a prohibitive racist statement, which when read for a second time can be understood as an affirmative utopian message; in the sense that *no minorities* might equal *no inequality*.

In comparison to the unchangeable gallery conditions at the Aarhus Art Building the Equestrian Hall gave the curators more room to experiment with the space and they adopted a less formal approach. The large, high-ceilinged space of the former riding school was landscaped into a series of zones, committed as much to social interaction and information distribution as to the display of works or positions. Their sponsor Ikea provided tables, chairs, bookcases and sofas for the space, and these accompanied a series of wooden structures including an oval shaped information booth, a bar and cafe, various enclosed spaces for showing video-work and partitioning and display walls which created niches and smaller zones which were used for installations and as non-specific social spaces for resting, meeting and reading. The most dominant zones were the information and communication centre that greeted visitors upon entering the station, the debate zone and

stage, which provided the platform for the numerous debates, hearings, concerts and performances and the bar and café area, where visitors could buy refreshments. A further important element of the space was a number of large carpets designed by Blank Rover, an Indonesian design collective who provided the visual identity for the project as a whole. The colourful carpets, which mixed abstract with graphic elements in relation to Minority Report's themes, were manufactured as sponsorship in kind by a Danish carpet company.

The zoning of the space introduced distinct spatial associations: the introduction of comfortable furniture and carpets created a back drop of a semi-domestic space, with connotations of a shared living room, the bar and café area created a leisure space with the onus on eating and drinking together and the slightly raised stage surrounded with informally arranged chairs created a zone where entertainment and debate came together. In and around these associative experiences visitors could engage with works from artists and presentations from activist groups. These included the installation documenting the previously discussed collaboration between Asa Sonjasdotter and schoolchildren. Amongst the other contributions was a small movie theatre curated by the artist and film-maker Heidrun Holzfeind, whose ongoing project *Alien* is a growing archive of film and video work exploring issues of migration and borders. Here visitors could drop into a rolling screening of works from various artists whose work ranged from documentaries to single screen artworks. As with the Aarhus Art Building the works extended to the outside space where a series of Flags entitled NOW-DANISH-INTER-NATIONAL by Jan Danebod flew from four flagpoles. The artist graphically combined various national flags in these works, suggestive of the merging of nation-states and the relative nature of national identification.

The information and communication centre, which was intended as the first port of call for visitors set the tone for the ensuing association between the artworks, the debates, and the café atmosphere. It introduced these elements

within an overall offer of a relaxed, informal engagement with ideas. A long pin-wall, a computer station with access to the internet and bookshelves housing a large archive of research material were brought together around a staffed information booth where tickets and publications could be purchased and where questions could be asked and information leaflets picked up. The zone provided reading material for those who wanted it and offered a deeper insight into the work of the various community and activist groups the curators had met with during their research. The logic of the centre extended to the space as a whole in that it offered a sliding scale of engagement, where the public could choose the extent to which they wished to be informed and importantly whether and in what way they wanted to voice their reaction to the information they received. So the centre offered the public a range of options from functional advice, such as getting directions to the other stations and receiving an overview of the program, to a more specific meeting of their concerns through introduction to printed material, direction towards the work of particular groups and suggestions of suitable research material to support their interests. Similarly the station as a whole offered the public a range of options in relation to the live programme. The open-plan nature of the space meant that visitors could casually attend discussions and hearings viewing them from afar over a cup of coffee or a drink, or choose to take a seat close to the stage and actively participate in the debate. In these ways the Equestrian Hall was designed to afford the audience flexibility in relation to how they navigated and encountered the experiences offered.

Of all the elements of the festival the live programme in the Equestrian Hall appears to have been the most demanding for the curators, who spent the month overseeing up to two events a day. It was also of particular appeal for the public, the larger debates drawing audiences of between 75 and 150 people, many of whom appear to have visited specifically for a debate or a concert rather than the whole festival. Nielsen repeatedly described the offer established by *Minority Report* as 'kaleidoscopic' (Nielsen, 2006, Appendix 4) - trying to approach the central issues from various angles, through the practices and experiences of various involved parties. As an illustration of

this the events programme included academic lectures, musical performances, political discussions, stand-up comedy, student debates, workshops with community leaders, activist presentations, Hip-hop dance demonstrations, theatre plays, and a discussion of the role of the art institution in issues of 'the politics of difference'. The programme was rounded off with an auction of the Ikea furniture in the Equestrian Hall, with all proceeds going to UNICEF. The diversity of this programme attracted very different members of the public, with members of various immigrant communities timing their visit to the exhibition to coincide with a debate in which a community leader or spokesperson, or a personal friend or family member was involved.

4.3.9 Introduction to analysis

The project *Minority Report* is of interest to this study for a variety of reasons. The most important of these is the adoption of the exhibition as a tool for awareness raising, in this case in regard to racial intolerance, a pressing issue of social inequality. In the above description of the project we can observe how the curators sought to structure a multi-layered forum for information, education and debate around this issue and to involve a range of parties in this process including those affected by intolerance in Aarhus. Involved in this process was the selection of artworks from international artists whose work deals with racial intolerance, which were exhibited alongside a variety of commissioned works addressing the theme, several of which were made in collaboration with communities in the city. The film program and the publication further extended the pool of points of view regarding the issue and the live program was developed with the key aim of inviting the white citizens of Aarhus and their immigrant neighbours to meet, present and discuss their own experiences.

In their concept for the exhibition and related publicity under the title 'Intention' the curatorial team state this aim clearly.

‘Through the exposure of the construction of intolerance, the exhibition hopes to create greater insight into the ways it operates and thereby prepare the way for alternative models for meaningful co-existence.’ (Minority Report, 2004).

Under ‘Concept and Methodology’ they address the audience with whom they hope to explore this greater insight.

‘The simultaneous unfolding of Minority Report in a series of different locations in Aarhus and environs allows the exhibition to reach a large number of different communities, while the differences in the character of the statements made and the activities initiated open up the possibility to engage a large number of diverse audiences’ (Minority Report, 2004).

In the same section they explain how they hope to do this.

‘...most importantly, by bringing together participants from all areas of the socio-political field and allowing their conflicting positions on the subject to be exchanged, Minority Report recognizes the antagonistic dimension of any democratic exchange...

Due to Minority Report's interdisciplinary and trans-national structure, however, the exchange of these positions now takes place across nationality, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, discipline, age, and privilege, allowing for an alternative complication of the stereotypical identities and fundamentalisms that intolerance is rooted in. The goal is not to contribute to an increased polarization, but to confront the various participants and audiences with new and unexpected questions, thereby challenging the current perspective on immigrants and refugees’ (Minority Report, 2004).

The decision to seize the initiative of an art festival to create such a forum, which importantly did not exist before hand, is indicative of the expedient and activist strategies adopted by the project's curators. These were expedient in the sense that they co-opted the political will to fund an art festival, and creatively manipulated the concerns behind such a decision. There was a level of opportunism in taking a prescribed entertainment format and filling it with something unusual, namely material of a highly urgent political nature. Of course this expediency must be understood in a positive sense in so far as the actions of the curators were tied to the ethical aim of making the situation in Aarhus visible, firstly to its own citizens and secondly on a national and international level. It was amidst a cloud of hyperbole surrounding the issue of immigration, which had found a place in the popular press and media, that the participants of the project set out to make certain injustices visible. In two steps they sought to present a counter argument to intolerance and to better delineate what lay behind the arguments of the Right with the overall aim of presenting a more balanced picture. The press coverage of the festival was understood as one possibility for communicating in this way and the public art interventions were developed as a further strategy for placing material in public spaces beyond those formally occupied by the festival activities. For its curators there was a belief that this multi-pronged initiative could help to change opinion and empower people to hold more nuanced points of view. In this sense the project was essentially activist in its nature, concerned as it was with implementing steps towards possible social change, and in this light it bears considerable similarities to a civil society campaign. Understanding the project in these terms, an analysis of the exhibition becomes a more complex task than an assessment of the selection of contributions it contained. We should also seek to measure its success in relation to awareness raising in an activist sense, placing specific weight on the change in the attitudes of participants and public as a result of engaging with the project.

Firstly the question arises of how the varying visual, textual and experiential contributions of the stations presented the visitors and participants the

material required for a change of mind and promoted the personal impulse to act on this knowledge? Secondly there are the questions of whom eventually made up the public for the project and whether the key intention of engaging the attention of audiences unsympathetic to the project's goal was achieved? Finally there is the question of legacy, given the relatively short scale of the project, namely what was the cultural, social and political impact of the project over time?

4.3.10 A hybrid project - festival or campaign?

It is interesting to consider how the concept of staging a *festival* influenced the project's effectiveness in relation to these questions, given that theoretically the curatorial team might have adopted a number of other specific formats to achieve their aims of challenging commonly held ideas about immigrants. Commissioned with public money to produce a festival for the town, there is evidence that the team had little choice but work with this format, and that although they found the idea challenging, it also interested them to imagine how best to use the festival format. Nielsen's comments on the intensity of public engagement that the term festival denotes give an idea of how they progressed. However, if we follow the analogy to a civil society campaign we can ascertain that although a festival might traditionally be used in campaigning as a fundraising or PR exercise, it is unusual for it to be adopted as the main framework or focus. Successful campaigning is generally understood as the coupling of effective lobbying with public awareness raising, leading to a change in policy or law.

It is important to note that the curators of *Minority Report*, though interested in exposing injustice, did not set out with the kind of goals that we might witness in the form of political or legal change. Similarly, although the team were joined in their conviction that racial intolerance was becoming more pronounced and acceptable, they undertook no baseline assessment or analysis of public opinion at the outset of the project to ascertain to what extent this was the case. So it is not possible to judge, in anything but vague

terms, whether opinion changed as a result of the project or not. In fact, the outset of the project seems for the most part to have been less a reaction to public opinion than to how such opinions were being represented by the popular press and manipulated by right wing political parties. Nielsen and Andersen both described in interview how personally upset they were with this state of affairs in Denmark, but they did not undertake the direct lobbying of the parties involved. So although the projects aims can be likened to an awareness raising campaign, its inspiration should be understood as an emotional and personal response to a perceived injustice and its methods come clearly from public arts programming, a fact visible in the forms it adopted; an art exhibition, a film programme, concerts, talks and workshops, public space interventions and a publication. Looked at in these terms we can see that *Minority Report* was a hybrid project, incorporating a number of different and potentially conflicting agendas. With this in mind Nielsen's adoption of the term 'kaleidoscopic' to describe the programming seems suitable.

In relation to the festival commission the team of curators decided from the outset to distribute the exhibition over various venues and to embrace a festival-like intensity in the time planning of the project and the programming of live events and activities. Along with the mix of artistic, activist and community-produced material this presented the public with a genuine multiplicity of options. The different stations and works within them acted as a range of different entrances into the festival and the topics it addressed, while various elements of the program overlapped each other occurring simultaneously in different venues. With the incorporation of the café into one of the venues and the prevalence of open debates and discussions the public's possible experience was broadened even further, with the possibility of not only being spoken to but also of speaking, the curators provided the space and the invitation to all participants and visitors to initiate and participate in discussions both formal and informal. The curators hoped that this diversity of offers for engagement would excite and engage a similarly diverse range of publics and that the adoption of multiplicity and

simultaneity in the festival would open up spaces for unplanned debate and unforeseen connections.

4.3.11 *Unfamiliar territory – the challenge to the public*

Given the scale of the project and the size of the budget, the visitor figures for *Minority Report* were comparatively low. Nielsen estimated that including repeat visits the project received less than 200 visitors a day during its month long run. Despite the curators' hopes that visitors would take a long weekend or a week to submerge themselves in the festival, repeat visits were not common, a fact ascertainable as the sale of three day and month tickets was considerably lower than the single visit tickets. It is difficult to know why more visitors did not attend the festival, but there is evidence that the multiplicity of the offer served to discourage and confuse some visitors rather than inspire them. Better said, confronted with a range of options the public appeared to enact a form of self-segregation, the older art-audiences were more prevalent visitors at the Aarhus Art Building, with younger visitors, artists and students more in evidence at the Equestrian Hall. Relative to the exhibition and the film programme the live events were well visited and the representatives of the immigrant and refugee communities for the most part limited their presence to attending these, visiting specifically when members of their community were speaking or performing.

One of the clearest outcomes in regards to producing publics was the role of the events program and to an extent some of the commissioned art projects, in making immigrant populations aware of one another. Specifically representatives of grass roots organisations from around Denmark were brought together, often for the first time during *Minority Report*. The archive in the information centre served further to help immigrant groups network with others exploring similar concerns, and there is evidence that these connections were taken further after the festival, that groups stayed in touch and that a tentative and disparate counter-public was formed during the project. The idea that the festival would provide a forum for exchange and for

airing conflicting points of view appears to have only partially taken place. Despite several right wing figures taking part in discussions, and the resultant arguments being given space on stage. The public were predominantly united in their support of the acceptance of immigrant and refugee communities, and exchanges between them made this solidarity evident. There is no evidence that the aim of bringing white and immigrant neighbours together to discuss their differences was achieved. The majority of those attending the talks and discussions were well educated and left leaning students and graduates and the debates were of an intellectual level consummate with the discursive interests of this group, to which many of the participating speakers from immigrant backgrounds belonged.

In addition to the links between immigrant organisations, the festival also opened routes of collaboration between these populations and the arts institutions of the city. The extensive research and meetings held between the curators of *Minority Report* and the numerous formal and informal organisations in the city, have made it easier for more recent projects to procure the involvement of these communities. Helen Lykke-Møller noted how the network built up during *Minority Report* had helped her in her programming of a series of literary evenings in the western part of the city as part of an exhibition project entitled *Images of the Middle East*. Although she also notes how the scale of the initial project meant that many connections were only provisional and that considerably more work was required to follow these successfully and win the trust of the immigrant populations. While commending the project's inclusion of educated and articulate spokespeople from immigrant communities, Lykke-Møller questioned the terms by which the average resident of the west part of the city could get involved in the discussions. She argues that although they were present to represent their experiences and attempts were made to accommodate them, the general level of discourse adopted in the project was 'too elitist and too academic' (Lykke-Møller, 2006, Appendix 6) for them to take part. Nielsen on the other hand strongly defended the project against accusations of elitism or academicism, seeing the fact that speakers from an immigrant background

took part in these high level debates as a key success of the project, correcting the image of the immigrant as inarticulate or unwilling to take part in democratic processes. In Nielsen's opinion poor attendance was a result of their naïve approach to marketing and partial and often critical coverage by the press.

Andersen's comments on the festival's approach to involving publics point to an interesting factor, that reflects on the issue of elitism and academicism on the one hand and on the problematic of adopting the art festival format for a political project on the other.

'We worked with the idea of public on two levels. The first level was to address people who were interested in art... The rest of the group we were addressing was everyone who is interested in politics and who cares about how society is developing. This could be anybody and hopefully everybody' (Andersen, 2006, Appendix 5).

The first public, the art public, attended the Aarhus Art Building as expected although in no greater numbers than for a usual exhibition. There is also evidence that a proportion of the public, who regularly attended exhibitions at the Art Building were unhappy with the exhibition. Andersen refers to her discussions with middle-aged art visitors who saw the political content as antithetical to their understanding of art and questioned the outspokenly left-wing agenda of the project, even asking why no radical right-wing art was presented in the exhibition. The second public should ideally have encompassed and extended the first, Indeed the middle aged art goers dislike of the exhibition shows that they did have an interest in politics, at least enough of an interest to wish to keep it separate from art. But more importantly than the question of the correct contents for an art festival is that of whether an interest in politics could be sensibly translated into the reason for attending a festival, of any kind. Politics, argued Nielsen is open to discussion, by all, for all. These discussions, argued Muller are exclusive,

elitist and academic. What we are witnessing is that, regardless of marketing, a festival of politics is perceived as a contradiction in terms.

4.3.12 The press and Realpolitik

Despite healthy reviews in the art press, none of these approached the projects professed inter-disciplinarity. The art reviews concerned themselves predominantly with the art on display and the works in the public space with only passing comment on the events program. Nielsen regretted that reviewers failed to discuss the fact that separate works had been created for the exhibition by activist groups, by artists in collaboration with immigrant communities, by documentary film-makers and political scientists. The art-press though sensitive to such projects as political, preferred to approach the works in a relatively classic way, and as such avoid debating the broader context of the exhibition. The local newspapers were even less interested in formally assessing the innovations that the project brought to the idea of a festival, and Nielsen was surprised by their inability in this respect.

‘These are not new curatorial approaches. There have been many of these kinds of shows over the last ten years and there are many curators working in this way, there really should by now be a way for the media to deal with these inter-disciplinary projects coming from art. We see inter-disciplinary activities in big conferences and other kinds of festivals and these do get coverage’ (Nielsen, 2006, Appendix 4).

Her comments suggest the dichotomy that the project was faced with; the necessity on the one hand for provoking public discussion about an issue like racism, in the place where it is happening and with the involvement of those affected, and the impossibility of doing so on the other because of the conservative climate in the context that bred the injustice in the first place. It is unclear if the curatorial team were aware of the challenge this represented when they chose to respond to the festival commission in the way they did.

Their uncompromising responses to the steering committees occasional requests for a softer, more popular approach, suggest that they knowingly challenged the traditional tastes of Aarhus's art community and courted the malicious reaction of the local press. The emotional commitment to the issue and their belief in experimental working processes were undoubtedly more important to them than the festival's popularity. There is a central problem with this strategy when we apply it to the aims of the project in terms of a direct shift in awareness of a population or a real effect on the policies of the right wing political majority. As Nielsen reflected:

'You can take the reception of the show two ways: on the one hand perhaps poor marketing and bad curating, 'an uninteresting show' or on the other you can analyze it in political terms and say that the 'silencing' of the show is part of a denial to really confront this as a construction. Maybe the show was seen as just another left wing revolt against a right wing political climate, maybe it became just part of the *Realpolitik*, not functioning politically, but becoming absorbed by the political debate' (Nielsen, 2006, Appendix 4).

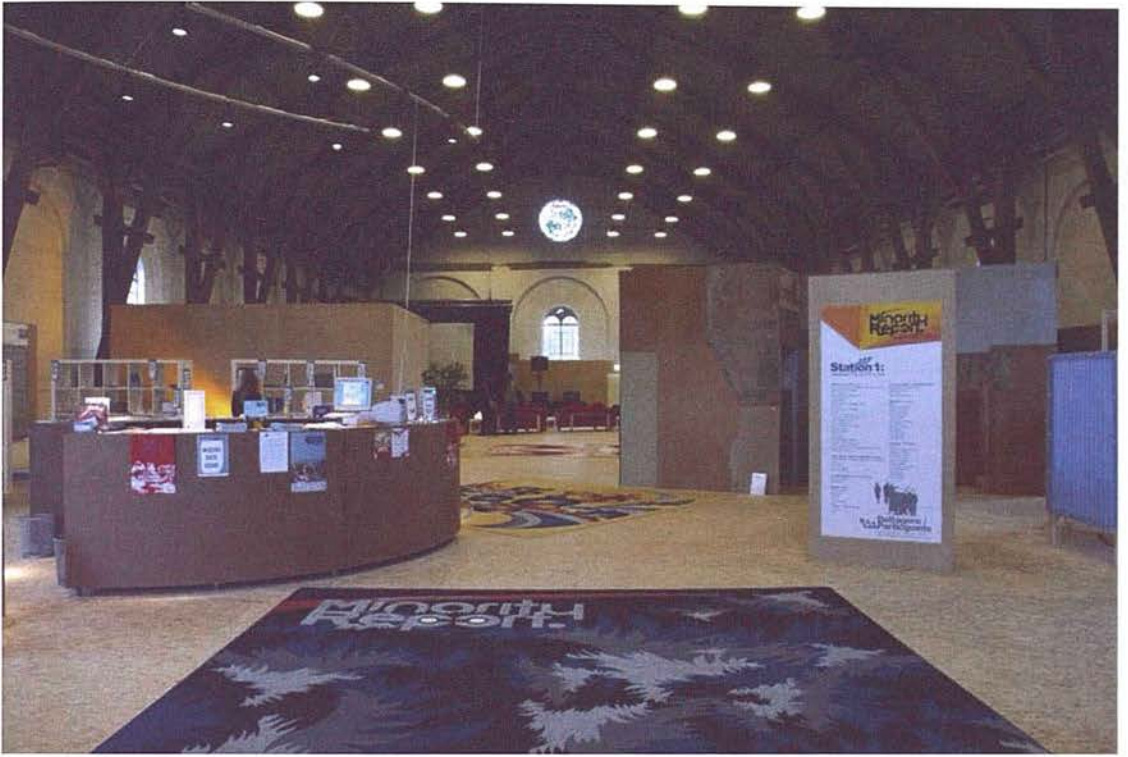


Fig.7. *Minority Report*. Exhibition view of the Equestrian Hall. Image courtesy Tone O Nielsen, photography Erik Balle.

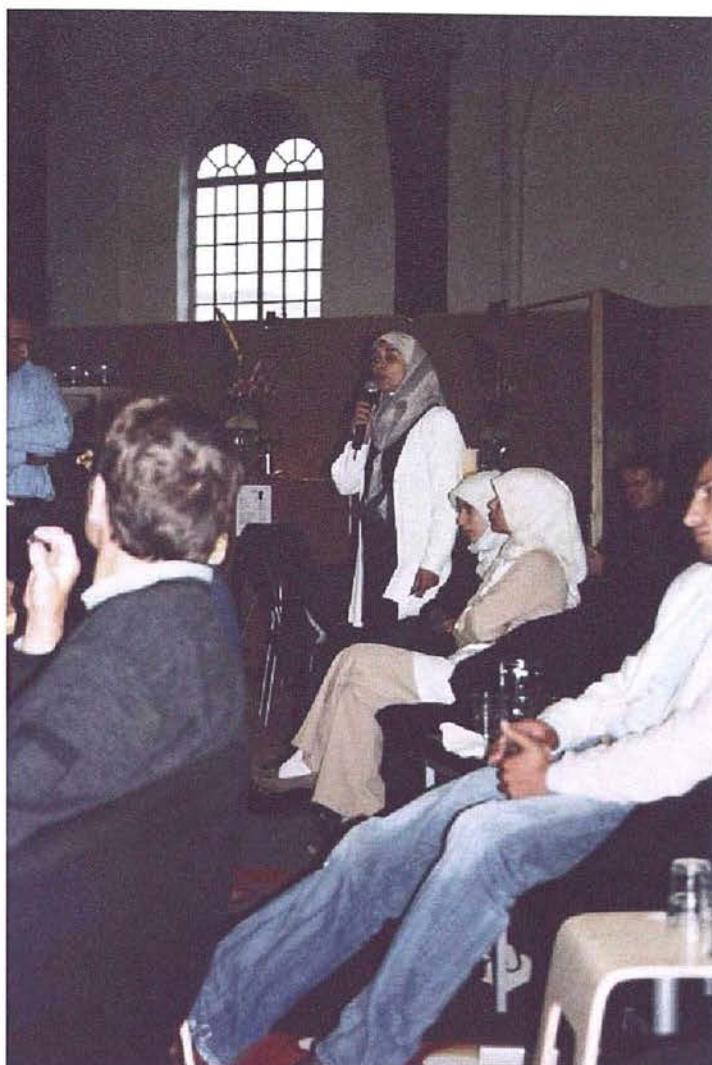


Fig.8. *Minority Report*. Visitors and participants take part in a discussion event in the Equestrian Hall. Image courtesy Tone O Nielsen, photography Katrine Skovgaard.



Fig.9. *Minority Report*. The café in the Equestrian Hall. Image courtesy Tone O Nielsen.



Fig.10. *Minority Report*. Exterior view of the Aarhus Art Building with the work of Hamayun Latif Butt and SUPERFLEX. Image courtesy Tone O Nielsen, photography Engedal Fotografi.



Fig.11. *Minority Report*. View of the exhibition in the Aarhus Art Building with the work of Wong, Hoy Cheong. Image courtesy Tone O Nielsen, photography Erik Balle.

4.4.1 *An invitation from Cairo.*

In 2002 Ursula Biemann led a video workshop in Cairo for artists from North Africa and the Middle East. The success of the workshop and Biemann's history of directing projects addressing intercultural themes encouraged the Swiss arts council, Pro Helvetia, to approach her in 2004 with an offer of financial support for an art project. The Cairo office is part of Pro Helvetia's structure for fostering cultural relations with other countries and the approach reflected their particular interest in commissioning projects to strengthen the links between Switzerland and Egypt. Biemann is known for her practice as an artist, theorist and curator, producing work which has over the years dealt repeatedly with the issues of migration, mobility, technology and gender; a practice that she believes 'situates itself between the white-West and various other cultural contexts or minority communities' (Biemann, 1999, p. 63). Although an exhibition was clearly expected as the outcome, the request did not initially specify what form this might take and whether they were interested in a solo-project or a curated project from Biemann. It is significant that the differences between these two modes of production are not always outwardly clear in her practice, a fact that leads to many of the most interesting questions in considering the project that she eventually realised in response to Pro Helvetia's initial approach. Biemann remembers how she raised the question and discovered the foundation's openness to either eventuality.

'Pro Helvetia asked me in 2004 if I wanted to do this big project for them, I asked them if it should be an art project or if I could involve others and they said, well it would be OK if you do something curatorial' (Biemann, 2007, Appendix 7).

She decided to 'do something curatorial' and 'involve others' although not before she answered for herself the question of what she would be interested

in developing for Cairo and where in the city she would like to place the exhibition.

‘I was not interested in doing anything on Egypt, so I decided quite early to look at a whole region and do a trans-national reflection of what is going on. It was always clear that the first exhibition would take place in Cairo, and we negotiated with William (Wells) to have it there, because it’s (the Townhouse Gallery) virtually the only place which can reach out to the kind of people we were interested in. It was obvious too that we would like to show it in Switzerland, because it’s a Pro Helvetia project. I had been talking with Katya (Garcia Anton) for a while about doing something and she jumped on it and said ‘oh yeah, let’s do that’. We had a good connection right away and this (Centre D’art Contemporain, Geneva) was one of the better places I could think of in Switzerland’ (Biemann, 2007, Appendix 7).

The choice of venue for the project in Cairo was somewhat limited given the relatively small number of institutions dealing with contemporary art, and the even smaller proportion of those interested in showing political or socially engaged practice (other independent spaces in Cairo that have regularly shown the work of political and socially engaged artists include Espace Karim Francis, Mashrabia Gallery, Cairo/Berlin and more recently CIC, the Contemporary Image Collective). In Biemann’s opinion the Townhouse Gallery presented a unique opportunity in Cairo, as the city’s largest and arguably most active independent arts centre, which is also well known for its educational programme of events, workshops and outreach. The latter point became important in establishing the trust of the public towards the project and helped also to attract a range of people to attend the conference which was held at the gallery on the day after the exhibition opened.

The project that became *The Maghreb Connection* began with several key individual decisions by the curator about the geographical focus, the reflective function and the specific sites for the exhibition. These primary decisions served to frame the terms of eventual collaboration with the artists, activists and other participants in the project. They also informed, for the greater part, the focus of the research and fieldwork undertaken by those artists who created new work for the exhibition.

4.4.2 *The focus on North Africa*

The knowledge that the exhibition would be first presented in Egypt had an important effect on the early stages of structuring the project. It was important for Biemann that a link was made between site and theme, and that the potential publics were considered in her planning. Biemann describes how she decided to avoid a project that took Egypt as its focus and the reasoning for her decision to take a trans-national approach is addressed in the introduction to the publication, which she co-authored with the cultural theorist Brian Holmes. In this they begin by connecting the primary site of exhibition: Egypt, to the geographical focus of the exhibition: the Maghreb.

‘Seen from its conception site in Cairo, once a decisive place of Arabic high culture, the Maghreb is where the sun sets: the west, meaning the Muslim Mediterranean countries of North Africa (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya). Anything west of Egypt is Maghreb, anything east of it is Machrek (Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria), so that Cairo assumes an oddly similar position to Greenwich, nominated by another empire as the point from which to divide and measure the world’ (Biemann & Holmes, 2006, p. 7).

The choice of direction from Egypt, the gaze to the west, was linked primarily to Biemann’s individual interest in a socio-political phenomenon highly

visible in this part of North Africa; one that she perceived as a potential focus for research and therefore theme for the exhibition.

‘A special focus is placed on Sub-Saharan transit migration – now the dominant and undoubtedly the most highly mediatized form of movement in the region – which has turned the Maghreb into a transit zone’ (Biemann, 2006, p. 2).

Holmes and Biemann continue their opening statement to explain how this topic is placeless and as such, must be understood as only tangentially linked to Cairo.

‘...we can no longer perceive of the world from a singular location of power, and it is doubtful that anyone ever could. In this project, we apprehend the region as a field of dynamic relations, a geography traversed and transformed by life in motion’ (Biemann & Holmes, 2006, p. 7).

The underlying message is both self-reflexive and critically aware, pointing to the problematic of the Swiss artist-curator invited to do something ‘on Egypt’ with money from a wealthy Swiss foundation, and trying to suggest a working method that addresses this. The premise for *The Maghreb Connection* sought to avoid the kind of cultural imperialism or tourist exoticism such a framework might have brought about. It is clear that Biemann immediately understood Cairo and the Townhouse Gallery as an equivalent to other cities and galleries where this exhibition might take place, rather than an exception, and in this way the exhibition was not site-specific. However, Cairo did provide an Arabic speaking context for the first display of the work that had emerged from the period of research, and as the project’s aims were to encourage reflection, it appeared important for the organisers that this should take place initially within the Arabic discourse. In respect to this it is notable that the publication is bilingual, with translations between English and Arabic.

The statement regarding the exhibition's focus also makes clear that the visibility afforded to transit migration by the European news media was potentially as much an interest for Biemann, and hence the project, as the changes brought about by this phenomenon on the ground. There is a sense that in preparing the exhibition she considered a double thematic, that of migrancy as an every-day occurrence with a long history in the region and that of its simultaneous mediatisation for a European audience. Again, the field of research is simultaneously afforded further definition by this decision, and opened out. It is not an exhibition *on* Egypt or *on* the Maghreb or even *on* Europe's policed borders but *on* the trans-national flows and networks that link all of these localities together.

Furthermore, Cairo's status as a centre for NGO and development activity was significant in the decisions made by Biemann, not unlike Geneva, where she selected to stage the second exhibition of this touring project. The presence of local populations who were professionally involved in the issues addressed by the project was clearly attractive to the curator and the art institutions. The populations of NGO and development workers represented a potential audience, a supplement to the regular art-interested gallery visitors and an interesting and interested source of attendees for the discursive events planned in both Cairo and Geneva. There is ample evidence that this strategy was successful, as NGO and UN workers were present at the exhibition openings and the project was reviewed and discussed in non-art publications aimed at the development sector. As Biemann herself notes, the inclusion of this public was promoted in advance of the exhibition:

'Cairo is the headquarters for the region and so there are a lot of NGO officials around, there is even development work being studied at the university, so it is almost an industry there. I was in Cairo six months beforehand to settle all the details for the exhibition and then with William we spoke about how to reach out to this public and he has excellent contacts to the NGOs because he

is in a committee where they do actions around migration. The books went out to the NGOs directly before the exhibition opened' (Biemann, 2007, Appendix 7).

4.4.3 Collaborative art and visual research

The Maghreb Connection is introduced in the publication as 'a collaborative art and visual research project' (Biemann, 2006, p. 2). This hybrid format combines research and fieldwork with the collaborative development of ideas, and the various forms of production here linked to taking these public: art making, exhibition making, writing and publication. The framework for this relates to earlier of Biemann's projects, as she makes clear.

'Over the years, I have tested and experimented with various forms of collaboration, and as soon as this collaboration is established it turns into some kind of curatorial project. The Maghreb Connection could relate as far back as *Kültür*. Where I first worked with a number of people and the work came together as an exhibition, but the result was not a curated art project in the traditional sense' (Biemann, 2007, Appendix 7).

Biemann's individual works have been exhibited internationally and use video as their primary medium. She has frequently described her own works as 'video essays', a term which references the use of video to present arguments arising from research. These works have been displayed in a variety of ways including mixed-media installations, multi-channel video presentations and screenings of single channel versions of her works. The work she developed for the exhibition *The Maghreb Connection* for example, entitled *The Agadez Chronicle*, occupied a darkened room and consisted of multiple video and slide projections. The short video sequences were edited from material recorded on a field trip to Agadez in Niger, one of the most important transport hubs for trans-Saharan region. In one of these video sequences, the names and activities of the people we see at a desert truck

terminal are explained by text overlaying the images, alongside interviews with the people who work there. This depiction of a specific place and those who work there affords an insight into the age-old business of migration. Other interviews focus on particular figures, while more abstract videos emulate the views of unmanned drones flown over the region. The installation mixes atmospheric techniques like balancing sound in the space and coordinating moving and still images, with the delivery of layers of information; image and text sources, which often overlap to suggest both connection and confusion.

Typical of Biemann, this work has changed since its showing in the exhibition and, expanding to accommodate new material, it is now entitled *Sahara Chronicle*. As with this example she is comfortable to vary the display of her works in response to various opportunities for presentation and over time the same works are adapted to suit art exhibitions, film screenings or presentations at activist festivals. Her associated work as a theorist and curator is strongly tied to this artistic work. The concept of the video essay, for example, is the focus of *Stuff It - The Video Essay in the Digital Age* (Biemann, 2003) one of several publications she has edited and produced in relation to her own work and projects. *Stuff It* was published as part of her research at the Institute for Art and Design Theory (ITH) at the Zurich University of the Arts (HGKZ, now ZHDK). The ITH in Zurich along with the Programme Études critiques curatoriales et cybermédias (CCC) programme at l'École Supérieure des Beaux-arts in Geneva were both involved in supporting the research phase of *The Maghreb Connection*.

In her statement regarding the connection between recent and past projects she refers to *Kültür*, one of her earliest curatorial projects, which she produced while working as a curator at the Shedhalle in Zurich. *Kültür* was the result of Biemann's collaboration with eight woman artists and social scientists living and working in Turkey and the project took as its subject urban space, the correlation between centre and periphery and the position of women within these social and economic structures. Like *The Maghreb*

Connection, it involved a period of collaborative, artistic research leading to a publication and two presentations; the first an exhibition in 1996 as part of the Shedhalle's program, the second a project developed with the same collaborators as part of the 1997 Istanbul Biennial. In the essay *Outsourcing and sub-contracting*, which describes her work on *Kültür*, Biemann describes how one curatorial aim of the project was to break with the established model of trans-national curating at that time.

'I wished to intervene in the relationship between a European art institution and artists from other contexts, to elucidate the biased contract between Western curators in possession of the concept, the funding and the decision-making power on the one hand, and the artists, hungry for international participation and recognition on the other' (Biemann, 1999, p. 64).

Another was to share her knowledge of an alternative, both to this curatorial hegemony, and to the kinds of works favoured in this one-sided contract.

'I went to Istanbul with the idea to present a different kind of art practice, one that claims a social commitment, is strongly context oriented, gender specific and collaborative in its mode of production. If Western art was being presented to Istanbul, someone needed to be on the spot to introduce a different strategy, a critical practice with a different understanding of the role of the artist. The intention was to acquaint some artists with an option that would also provide the tools to deconstruct what seemed attractive at the moment, namely the white master discourse' (Biemann, 1999, p. 64).

It is probable that her comment regarding the presentation of 'Western art' in the city is a veiled allusion to the Istanbul Biennial established in 1987, as later in the same text she critiques the habits of Western curators working with large-scale on-site exhibitions that 'come across as gigantic advertising

campaigns for Western art' (Biemann, 1999, p. 65). She proposes that the critical practice she took with her as a potential tool provided an alternative, although it is not entirely clear if she means an alternative to Western art; perhaps through its trans-national working methods, or an alternative tradition within Western art; which might reference the long history of socially engaged, site specific, collaborative, feminist and queer practices. Either way, Biemann describes the curatorial impulse in *Kültür* as interventionist, noting five areas where she sought to intervene with the project. Alongside her aim to critique and transform the existing power relations between the European and non-Western art worlds she also sought to challenge the stereotyped image of Turkish women in Switzerland, to come up with gender strategies for art practice in Istanbul and to address the sensitive issue of the cultural repression of the Kurds in the North of Turkey. Looking at these examples, and how *Kültür* addressed them, it is clear that when she talks of intervention she means it in terms of discourse rather than direct action. Rather than seeking political or social change through activist means she gathers collaborators around her to create images, texts and experiential spaces (exhibitions or presentations) that insert themselves in the spaces between accepted injustices or dominant generalisations. It is this insertion that she refers to as intervention, and she uses similar terminology in respect to *The Maghreb Connection*, describing how the project: '...sets out to intervene in the current discursive and visual representations with a contribution of new videos, photo series and research essays' (Biemann, 2006, p. 2).

4.4.4 Proposing deconstructive practice

Alongside her decisions regarding the exhibition venues, the geographical focus and the subject or theme of *The Maghreb Connection*, Biemann was also interested in the adoption, from the outset, of a particular approach to these, which she imagined informing the project's reflections.

‘I wanted clearly to pursue a geographic approach, which doesn’t mean that there is no social factor in all of this or no question of human rights, but that we were particularly interested in understanding this trans-cultural tissue, that is being created through a number of dynamics, which we risk ignoring if we focus in on just the migrants themselves’ (Biemann, 2007, Appendix 7).

As participant, initiator and overall curator of the project the delineation of this geographic approach was on the one hand a personal guideline; informing the way *Agadez Chronicle* was made, and on the other a recommendation to her collaborators. There is a comparison to her work on *Kültür*, where Biemann introduced an approach that, as she put it, presented an option that she felt provided tools for deconstruction. Where in *Kültür* this focussed on the white master discourse and its myriad of accompanying preconceptions played out in the space between Turkey and Switzerland, the focus of the deconstruction job at hand in *The Maghreb Connection* was geography itself.

The precise meaning of this broad term geography in a context where it is to be deconstructed by visual practices is not immediately clear. Questioned about this, Biemann introduces a definition and a suggestion of how one might adopt such an approach as an artist:

‘I mean geography in the sense Irit Rogoff’s uses the term, to mean a theory that can allow us to reflect on people, movement and space. Imagine doing this through a visual practice, so you think of image production in relation to the production of space, which is being formed by the movement of people... But, it’s not just a visual project, we work with artistic means and that is more than just making certain hidden dynamics visual. Geography is a signifying practice to start with, through excessive visual means these days, so in that sense it is far more than a simple critique of the cartography from the nineteenth century. It’s really the case

that surveillance and control mechanisms produce a huge electronic world of visual expressions today, that's how they operate. So one has to intervene on this level also, by producing a visual insertion of some kind' (Biemann, 2007, Appendix 7).

Here Biemann refers to Irit Rogoff's book *Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture* (Rogoff, 2000), in which Rogoff uses a number of examples from contemporary art to address the question of whether geography still offers a valid tool for analysing the globe, tied as it is to specific representations of truth, and limited by the points from which these truths are told. The book proposes the artworks it describes as incidences of a visual geographic practice capable of dealing with the complex issues of belonging, exclusion, identity and place, where geography as a geophysical branch of science can only fail. Biemann and Holmes go further, proposing that projects like *The Maghreb Connection*, use 'the expanded field of art reconceived as visual geography' to develop what they name a 'counter-geography' (Biemann & Holmes, 2006, p. 8).

'the primary aim of *The Maghreb Connection* is to develop a visual and discursive counter-geography of the forms of migratory self-determination and organization. Underlying this is the great need we see to expand and diversify the public discourse on human circulation, and the visual worlds we create around it. Counter-geography is where the subversive, informal and irregular practices of space take place, the ones that happen despite state forces and supranational regulations' (Biemann & Holmes, 2006, p. 7).

In relation to this term they define that the primary aim of the project is one of production. They are looking to foster a new kind of visual and discursive expression, better suited to addressing the issues at hand than that which exists to date. The issue of making these practices public is closely related, but secondary. They isolate a *need* to extend the public discourse on the issue

and on the way it is mediated, but there is an assumption that the counter-geography they describe is inherently communicable, and that the chosen format of exhibition is suitable to this end. When asked about these assumptions, Biemann defended her working method.

‘It never occurred to me that the exhibition format might be a problem, because this is incidentally the way I work and have worked for many years. I can’t think of with which other means besides photography, mapping and video, which you find in the exhibition, you might do the job of signifying in this domain of movement and space’ (Biemann, 2007, Appendix 7).

4.4.5 Involving others

The process of collaboratively developing their individual works for the exhibition began a year and a half before the opening and book launch. It involved a core group of nine artists selected and approached by Biemann. She describes this process as ‘involving others’ and the first step of the involvement for her was the working up of a concept, which she could use to communicate her initial ideas and interests for the project; a text and image document which was circulated as a PDF which all could read, adapt and recirculate:

‘This concept was used to communicate with all the artists, participants and partners. We had just one concept for everybody, which started to inform the whole thing. As we went along we redefined it and people started to add pictures and their own material, forming an organic thing that grew and grew until it became rather final in its form. This helped us define where we needed to go on the field trips, and where the groups were that we wanted to investigate’ (Biemann, 2007, Appendix 7).

Early in the process of administrating the project Biemann recognised that, despite the generous support for production and exhibition offered by Pro Helvetia, there was a shortfall in the funding for her own research. With this in mind she approached the ESBA (l'École Supérieure des Beaux-arts) in Geneva and The ZHDK (Zurich School of Art and Design) in Zurich and requested their support. Both schools responded with two years of research funding on the condition that Biemann lead workshops with students, give public presentations and that the exhibition and publication could be seen as part of their research output. In Geneva the workshop focussed on video making and lead to a new work by two students, Camille Poncet and Mouhamed Coulibaly-Massassi being shown in the exhibition. In Zurich the workshop looked more at theory and resulted in double page interventions in the publication from students Anuschka Esper, Alexandra Stock, Brigit Koch and Martinka Kreneckova. Part of the support from the ESBA, Geneva was the appointment of the artist and researcher Charles Heller, as research and curatorial assistant for the project. Biemann drafted the first concept for *The Maghreb Connection* in close collaboration with Heller, who was also invited to make a new work for the exhibition and was later closely involved in the planning and production of the publication.

Biemann talks of the various forms of collaboration that emerged from the work on the concept, and the different intensities of working and exchanging ideas within the group.

‘The way *The Maghreb Connection* developed, you keep in contact, you look at each other’s work, you constantly hear what areas the others are covering, so that you have less of a responsibility to cover everything in your piece. You exchange theoretical interests and exchange data saying ‘hey - have you read this?’ You work naturally but not in this tight sort of way where you meet regularly across a table and make common decisions, so it’s not at all that kind of collaboration’ (Biemann, 2007, Appendix 7).

It was her express interest that the group produce new works for the exhibition, and she encouraged them to undertake research, and to develop their works in relation to this.

‘You need to do research to understand where discourse and representation is about your subject matter at that particular time, in order to define a field of intervention. Otherwise you don't know where to start with a practice when you are unfamiliar with this whole landscape.’ (Biemann, 2007, Appendix 7).

Much of the collaborative effort went into creating a loose network with the other members of the working group, reflecting on the work they were doing and discussing how this was to come together in the exhibition and publication. Several of the works were made as the result of field trips to the Maghreb, sub-Sahara and European Mediterranean. Raphael Cuomo and Maria Iorio were already researching for their film *Sudeuropa* on the Italian Island of Lampedusa when Biemann approached them. Armin Linke and Biemann went together to Agadez in Niger where both visited the Uranium mines, Biemann filming for her work *Agadez Chronicle* and Linke creating a new photo-series. Charles Heller visited Morocco, filming in Oujda, Laayoune and Tanger accompanied by Biemann, who hoped to be of help, given Heller's inexperience of filming in such environments. In some cases the wish to involve certain artists in the collaborative process of creating new works for the project proved impossible due to restrictions on the artist's time or other commitments. In the case of Yto Barrada, for example, after meetings and discussions Biemann selected a series of existent photographic works, *A life full of Holes – the Strait Project*, for the exhibition.

Biemann was clear from the start that the project as a whole was her idea. She set the tasks for the other participants, guiding the overall field in question within which the artists were free to negotiate their own practices in communication with one another.

‘I was content oriented in bringing the group together. This one covered this and this one more that, this one I knew had a more artistic/poetic approach while this one had a more political/essayistic approach to the concerns of migration. So I knew that there were not so many players in this project and that each had to take their place. I saw this clearly from the outset; from the beginning to the end I am the curator of this project’ (Biemann, 2007, Appendix 7).

Egyptian artists Doa Aly and Hala Elkoussy attended the video-essay workshop Biemann gave at the Townhouse Gallery in 2002, and when Biemann came to select artists, they were both invited to develop new video works for the exhibition. A pattern emerges of a strong pedagogical link between Biemann and several of the artists in the project. Some she had taught in the past, others became involved in the project through her teaching in Geneva and Zurich, and in the case of Heller, she reciprocated the support he was giving to the project with on-site training and advice. Biemann is clear about the involvement of students and young artists in projects like *The Maghreb Connection*.

‘It is easier to involve young artists in committing for the period of two years to develop something new than established artists. Maybe here is the real line; I just could not find established artists who could give that kind of time to a project that was not their own idea’ (Biemann, 2007, Appendix 7).

4.4.6 Installing the work and providing interpretation

Biemann installed the works in Cairo and Geneva together with the artists, when present, and with the respective directors of the institutions; William Wells and Katya Garcia Anton. The exhibition spaces differed greatly. The Townhouse Gallery is distributed between three adjoining spaces on one

street; a factory space, shop and an old villa provide a variety of unusual spaces used for exhibition. In Geneva the exhibition filled a single floor of the Centre d'Art Contemporain; an ex industrial factory space with high ceilings and windows on three sides, divided into open sided cubes by a central structure of free-standing walls.

In the case of *The Maghreb Connection*, with its primary focus on the development of new works through a collaborative period of research, the question of exhibition design was of relative unimportance to Biemann. In neither Cairo nor Geneva was it considered necessary to adapt the exhibition spaces, to create a specific atmosphere through scenography, or to organise the space to govern the sequence in which the works were seen. Biemann adopted a pragmatic approach to placing the works in the space, in the belief that this would accentuate the public's attention to the already complex content of the work and avoid distraction.

'As an artist I am used to one particular work being shown in five, six, seven different forms of installation. So I get much less worked up about one particular space, because I know it's not the last or a unique time that this will be shown. So I try something and say 'this looks ok'. I think the works on show are very multi-layered so I didn't think I needed to add any in-between comments by intervening in the overall picture as a curator.' (Biemann, 2007, Appendix 7).

The approach to hanging the work was broadly intuitive, and in Cairo the scale of the different spaces, and their light levels often governed the decisions about what works were shown where. In Geneva in the larger more homogenous space, each of the artistic contributions was attributed a cube with some works sharing a single unit and the two projected works shown in the space's predestined dark space. In her display decisions Biemann is clearly influenced by her work as an artist and a certain relativity in relation to the issues of space and display that has grown out of her experience of

showing her work in different constellations. This attitude also underlies her method for *The Maghreb Connection*, which is based on the idea that the work is the primary site where content is mediated, and that the selection of artists and development of works, should necessarily carry more weight than the process of structuring their display. Put simply, this was a project focussed on developing content rather than on its presentation in exhibition.

In a research-based project of this kind, the artists are able to have a public in mind from the outset of the creation of the work, and to debate and discuss this over the period of producing the work.

‘...from the start we all understood that we were making work for Cairo and we wanted to be sure that they understood what we were trying to do’ (Biemann, 2007, Appendix 7).

A more organic approach to interpretation is possible where the recognition of particular requirements grows through the projects production rather than arise at the point of installation. In this exhibition there is evidence of how the knowledge of where these works would meet their public affected decisions made about the internal qualities of the works. For example, during the production of *Sudeuropa*, the film by Raphael Cuomo and Maria Iorio, the decision was made to subtitle in Arabic and English, which in turn strongly affects the aesthetic and semantic qualities of the work. The most prominent interpretative decision reached by the exhibition teams was the commissioning of a wall graphic designed by Rein Steger in which the names and biographies of the projects participants are depicted floating over a non-specific desert landscape, linked by a network of fine dotted lines that appear like pathways through the sand. This design appeared in both exhibitions as a wall graphic and throughout the publication where it functioned as a form of dynamic indexing tool linking participants, works and text fragments. The graphic clearly sought to introduce the project, suggest its inter-disciplinary nature and the network character of its production. It also, by making a visual link to the publication, pointed out that the project included discursive

and text based contributions; that the exhibition was only one part of *The Maghreb Connection*. Furthermore Steger's graphic has the qualities of a leitmotif for what was probably the most ambitious of the projects aims; to create a working method that mirrored the issue being researched.

'Reflecting the subject of research we made trans-nationalism the prime mode of operation for our project. The process of collaboration, the cross-references in common reading, the travelling exhibition and the circulation of videos and a bilingual publication are all intended to contribute to the emergence of a trans-national consciousness' (Biemann & Holmes, 2006, p. 7).

4.4.7 Introduction to analysis

In the description of this case study we can firstly identify the highly specific collaborative research process that constituted *The Maghreb Connection*, and ascertain Biemann's central role in how this was developed. It is of specific interest here to reflect on this period of interaction between the artists, exchange of practical knowledge and co-development of the concept. Secondly we can see how the character of the project, with its itinerant period of research and touring exhibition, was intended to be explicitly self-reflexive. Describing the thinking behind the project much weight is laid by Biemann and her co-editor Brian Holmes on the fact that the production methods for *The Maghreb Connection* are designed to be representative of the emerging trans-national consciousness the exhibition and publication seek to contribute to. This contribution of the project, as a whole, was described by Biemann as an intervention into the current discursive and visual representations of these issues. We can see how, in attempting this, she invited a disparate selection of artists to make and think, with her and with each other, about the specifics of a region and the notion of geography. This lead to a year and a half of research, travel and development, the artists variously in loose contact or in close cooperation with each other, with a clear

view of the goal: an exhibition in Cairo. Thirdly, we can establish that Biemann approached this last stage, the exhibition, quite differently to the research and production of the works displayed within it and the development of the publication that accompanied it. From the outset she decided to halt the collaborative aspect of the project at this point, and reach decisions as to how works would be exhibited and interpreted with the minimum of involvement of the other artists.

Observing this separation we can see how Biemann understood the organic collaborative process as a method by which works could be developed and made, and that her guidance in respect to this reflected the special nature of these commissioned works. She was the central source of practical and intellectual support for the artists, the majority of whom were much younger than her and had limited experience of the kind of visual research that she sought to foster with the project. Putting the exhibition aside, Biemann can also be understood to have curated the process of production from the outset, selecting the participants with the resultant exhibition in mind, guiding their work in particular media and influencing in the discussion with the other artists who should research what, and in which region. Returning to the exhibition however, Biemann chose to present a traditional exhibition of works arranged in a space. The nature of this separation, between the development of works and the development of the exhibition, becomes clear when we consider the former involved artists, activists, geographers, sociologists, historians and any number of other specialists, while the latter was governed by Biemann alone.

It is undoubtedly as a result of this separation between research stage and exhibition stage that it is not clear, when looking at the exhibition, that the majority of the works were created in a collaborative research framework. A major critique of this approach is that, given the cross-disciplinary exchange that took place in these important stages, no attempt is made to translate this to a visiting public through the medium of the exhibition. In fact, quite the opposite appears to be occurring as the works in the gallery space are

presented as discretely authored documents, and the traditional hanging and labelling of works points away from a sense of process and towards an idea of autonomous art objects whose value is intrinsic not contextual. Despite being linked by similarities in media, approach and content, the distribution of works in the spaces in Cairo and Geneva follows a practical and intuitive logic of what fits where in the space, rather than any logic of relations, overlaps or sequences of work that might bear witness to the exchanges and simultaneous research trajectories involved in the working process.

In Geneva the single large space was divided by temporary walls into a series of cubes, open at one side to the perimeter of the space. The public circled around the outside of the space and the works were revealed in the cubes or on the outside walls as they circulated. Biemann and Katya Garcia Anton, who directs the space, chose to distribute the works following the logic of one cube - one work (or series of works) from each of the artists or artist duos. The resultant experience, seemingly unconsciously arrived upon, was linear and incremental. When Holmes and Biemann argue that the exhibition itself has a role in the geographic practice that *The Maghreb Connection* proposes, they specifically state the intention 'not only to function as a relay of the research, but to create an environment of possible experience' (Biemann & Holmes, 2006, p. 8). However, the adherence to a classical display and interpretation schema works against this professed hope. By removing all trace of process that lies outside the works, and treating these as discrete products the exhibition actively effects disengagement, or at the very least privileges specific terms of engagement. Although the aim of the exhibition professes to be to shift the visitors' habitual references momentarily, it serves instead to reinforce them. Although the commissioning of a diagrammatic graphic for the exhibition sought to reinforce the idea of connections visually, it did only this, and remained a poetic representation. The graphic may have lead some visitors to understand that the knowledge exchanged, and experiences shared, by the participants in this dynamic process had come to rest in the works on display. But the issue is one of whether this was

successful, given the contradictory messages sent by the exhibition format selected.

In interview Biemann suggests that she never considered questioning the exhibition architecture, and it can be argued that as an artist her sensibility and focus lie elsewhere. However it can also be argued that it is her artistic approach and her own interest in precision, which permeate her approach to all stages, that were eventually projected onto the works of others in a normalising fashion; that in addition to initiating them she took it upon herself to finish them by means of the exhibition. In effect this means that the works with dialogical beginnings, and those still in progress appeared tidied up through the terms by which they are displayed.

4.4.8 Alignment, Authorship and Pedagogy

In another part of the interview Biemann describes how the television reporters who attended the opening of *The Maghreb Connection* in Cairo were particularly interested in talking about the process by which the exhibition was made, excited by the potential of the workshop as a model for cultural production (Biemann, 2007, Appendix 7) and perhaps, inevitably, comparing the exhibition to representations possible within the field of television. That they favoured talking about the process of researching and co-producing the works exhibition, rather than posing questions about display, or about the content of the works themselves, is significant. As a result of Biemann's rigorous approach to content management and the close contact she fostered between the artists during the research period the public were presented with a compact exhibition in which the works took turns to tell specific parts of a very complex story. Though differing in tone and media, the works were aligned with each other in their sensibility and appeared to share a common approach, resulting in an exhibition that proposed and incrementally supported an argument but had few internal disputes or differences of opinion. Biemann was satisfied that the interest

shown in the processes behind the exhibition pointed to its openness, but it can be argued that quite the opposite was true, that the hermetic nature of the whole begged questions of production, because they were, in the way the works were presented and interpreted, not easily understood.

To propose that this might have been the case is not to suggest that Biemann wilfully obscured the collaborative nature of the project, but that her understanding of how exhibitions function may have unwittingly had that effect. In the interview she argues that the traditional approach to displaying and interpreting in the gallery spaces was suitable because of the multi-layered nature of the works. The suggestion being that an alternative approach to exhibition would have over-complicated readings of the project, a true representation of which she believes could be found in the works themselves. When asked in interview whether exhibition was a suitable format to represent the working process Biemann replied that she always made exhibitions and that she could not 'think of with which other means besides photography, mapping and video, which you find in the exhibition, you might do the job of signifying in this domain of movement and space' (Biemann, 2007, Appendix 7). Here she points to her fundamentally formal understanding of the exhibition as medium, for her its meaning is synonymous with the media it contains. In her reflections on the relationship between works and exhibition she reveals that she sees little division between a group of works and an exhibition, and that the latter is simply a space to display the former. In this presumption she overlooks the nature of the exhibition as a social space, and with this denies the possibility that adopting a traditional approach denotes a particular interpretative attitude.

None of this is *per se* a criticism of Biemann's decision to adopt a classical approach to display and interpretation, or to commission works in particular media. But, given its collaborative focus in the research and art-production stage, it does raise the question of why the exhibition defaulted to these particular ritualised forms? The visitors to the exhibition may well have asked themselves if their role in relation to the presentation of the works was

as dynamic a process as the preceding processes, which they could not be part of. In this case the formal reduction of the exhibition aesthetics and the separating of the work, which constituted the exhibition, into a series of discrete works for solitary contemplation made sure that this was not the case.

Biemann's own artwork inhabits a central place in the exhibition, not spatially, but in terms of its internal formal and aesthetic qualities, which, when compared with the work around it appear to lead by example. Her video installation is exemplary of the focus on trans-nationalism she favours, just as it is paradigmatic for the geographical approach she describes as the curatorial intention for the project as a whole. In interview, when talking about the project she frequently switches between the first person singular and the first person plural, so the I (Ursula) becomes interchangeable with the we (the project group), and it is hard to know what emerged from the collaborative working method and what was explicitly provided by Biemann. This detail denotes the intense co-authoring of the contents of the exhibition and publication, and the extent to which, in representing the project Biemann talks for the group's production, and simultaneously for her specific role within it. Although there was no point at which Biemann was not wholly transparent about her control of the overall structure and the research methodology *The Maghreb Connection*, the inclusion of a period of collaboration and exchange must certainly have complicated the issue of authorship and ownership of material for the various parties involved. That the established artists she refers to do not have the time to get involved in such projects is one point, but the other may well be that they do not have the inclination to share ideas and working methods within such structures. The problem here is associated with the imagined threat to originality and uniqueness such collaborations might entail, primarily imagined by those parts of the art world and market whose economies rely on such concepts.

More interesting regarding those who did take part, is the potential problem with the overall authorship of the whole by Biemann, on the one hand as the

curator and on the other, perhaps more contentiously, as an artist in her own right. Although there are no signs that the artists took issue with the terms of their involvement with the project, the issue of artistic freedom where another artist presets the theme, site and working method remains. In interview Biemann is clear that this frame has been conceived for her own research and artwork as much as for the project as a whole, and this represents a very interesting reflection on the trust and level of exchange between participants. Her role was an active and informing one. The collaborative aspect of the process began only once Biemann had set the frame for this and under her influence it was located strictly in the research for and production of works for exhibition and texts for publication.

Given her relationship to the two art academies that supported the project on the grounds of its value as research, and the inclusion of young artists who have graduated from these academies, there is clearly a pedagogical relationship between the curator and a number of the younger artists. Though Biemann herself eschews the term workshop, proposed by the press, there is ample evidence that the exchanges that took place followed a workshop model, with Biemann adopting from the outset a double role as workshop convener and participant. It is possible that the term workshop, with its link to industry and object production, is less suitable in describing the activities that constituted *The Maghreb Connection* than research, with its link to academia, science and the production of knowledge but the former suggests more clearly the important role of the group in the development of the outcome. With foreknowledge of the working method, the works presented in the exhibition revealed how participants assimilated exchanges in relation to techniques and media as much as on a discursive level. Biemann clarifies the nature of her view on the partnerships, in her own comments on the differences between collaborating with younger artists and with what she describes as 'equal partners' (Biemann, 2007, Appendix 7), and in her description of the collaborative process, which she promoted as a practical way of covering ground more quickly and precisely, rather than one designed for reaching common decisions.

This has to be seen as the most interesting aspect of the project: the formation of a temporary community of practice, with the aim of learning and producing together. Within this framework, Biemann's role as facilitator of the group is clear, and validated by the will of the others to take part in a variety of more and less central or peripheral attachments to the group. Biemann's approach to encouraging production was at times unequivocal, as when during a field trip to an informal migrant camp in Morocco, Charles Heller recalls how she instructed him to gather material for his work. While in a car driving to the camp Heller remembers passing groups of migrants and 'Ursula, stuffing her camera into my hands: 'film.' Drive-by filming migrants through the window of a car, the camera feels like a 'foreign body' (Heller, 2006, p. 107). The account reveals how Heller, who began the project as a research assistant rather than a participating artist, was encouraged by Biemann to experiment with making work. That such changes in role occurred within the group, and that the participants were supportive of these suggests the extent of co-participation in the processes informing the works. Regardless of the aforementioned critique of how these works were eventually framed, the processes which lead to their constitution appear aligned with the 'continuing theatres of learning and questioning' (Biemann & Holmes, 2006, p. 8) which Biemann and Holmes saw as central to the project.



Fig.12. *The Maghreb Connection*. View of the exhibition at the Centre D'Art Contemporain in Geneva with works by Armin Linke. Image courtesy Ursula Biemann, photography Ilmari Kalkkinen.



Fig.13. *The Maghreb Connection*. View of the exhibition at the Centre D'Art Contemporain in Geneva with works by Camille Poncet & Mouhamed Coulibaly-Massassi and Ursula Biemann. Image courtesy Ursula Biemann, photography Ilmari Kalkkinen.

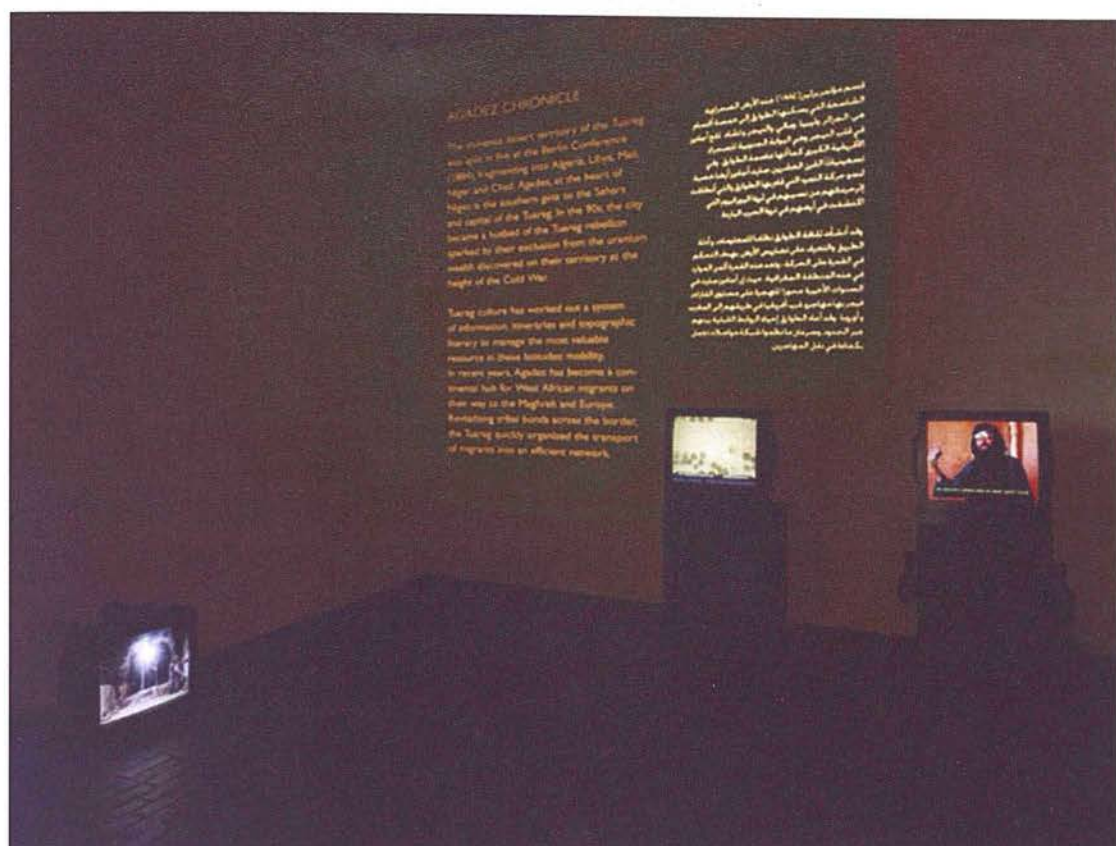


Fig.14. *The Maghreb Connection*. View of the exhibition at the Centre D'Art Contemporain in Geneva with work by Ursula Biemann. Image courtesy Ursula Biemann, photography Ilmari Kalkkinen.

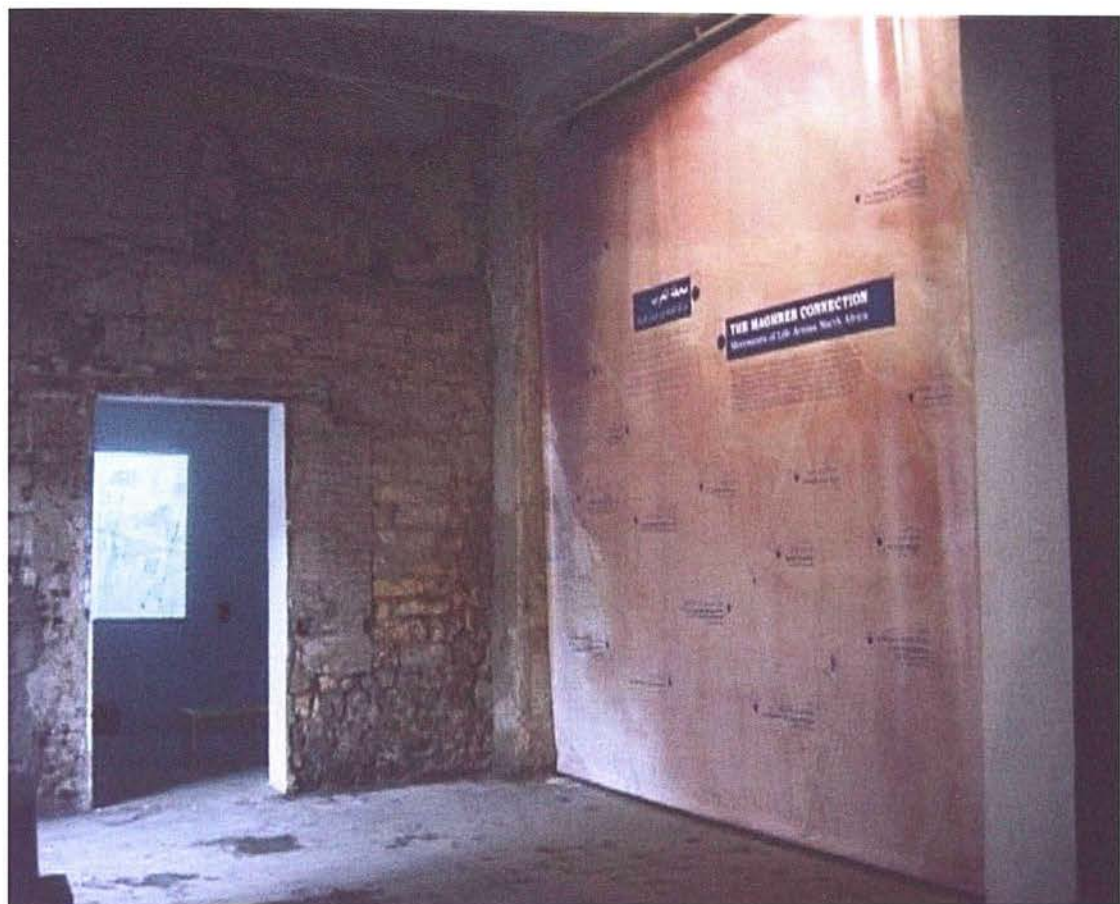


Fig.15. *The Maghreb Connection*. View of the exhibition at the Townhouse Gallery in Cairo with wall graphic by Rein Steger. Image courtesy Ursula Biemann and the Townhouse Gallery, Cairo.



Fig.16. *The Maghreb Connection*. View of the exhibition at the Townhouse Gallery in Cairo with works by Yto Barrada. Image courtesy Ursula Biemann and the Townhouse Gallery, Cairo.



Fig.17. *The Maghreb Connection*. View of the exhibition at the Townhouse Gallery in Cairo with works by Ursula Biemann. Image courtesy Ursula Biemann and the Townhouse Gallery, Cairo.

Chapter 5.

Conclusion:

The ends of curating and the beginnings of the exhibition

5.1 The ends of curating.

The second chapter of this study addresses the so called crisis in curating by interpreting the claims associated with the phrase as a sign of the essential fragility of the core conditions for the curator's professional legitimacy. Firstly the premise that the public institution is actually for the public, secondly that the artist is special and finally that art is *per se* good for people. It is valuable to revisit these key points here in the study's concluding chapter, to elaborate upon them and to look at them again in the light of the conclusions of the third chapter and the analysis of the case studies. From the outset the study shows that when talking about curating we meet with resistance. These points of resistance are marked by conflicting ideas as to what is right and wrong, good and bad, acceptable and unacceptable, and therefore they reveal and delineate what we might choose to call the ends of curating. The term ends is adopted here as a topographic metaphor, in the sense of boundaries or borders. So the ends of curating are not to be confused with the end of curating, the metaphor is not temporal or suggestive of the death of curating; rather it suggests the outer limits of a domain. In the third chapter it was argued that the term curator can no longer be seen as an identifiable with a distinct and distinguishable figure, but should be understood as placeholder, that curating itself can be seen as a site traversed by numerous itinerant figures. We can establish then that this site has borders, and it is these that at once define and confine curating.

The first of these lies in the cellar of the state-sponsored art institution, an internalized boundary swallowed up in its body. It is here that the institution keeps its subjectivity, partiality and hidden commercial agendas, out of plain

sight. To cross that line is to see the institution for what it is: a civilizing power, a normalizing bureaucracy, a system of calculated inclusions and exclusions that police the historically acceptable and enforce the market of taste. At this boundary, curating is the upholding of the pretence of transparency, the enactment of the institutions faux-publicness while keeping the cellar door firmly closed. The second boundary lies along the threshold of the artist's studio. It is the imaginary boundary between making and showing, the rehearsed relation between the one (artist) and the many (everybody else). The studio, in this instance, is a projection of art's autonomy, its separation from the wider world, and the threshold precisely that boundary which risks undoing this illusion. To cross the line is to see art as the product of the many, to see authorship as composite and to recognize the artist as synonymous with everybody else. At this boundary, curating adds credibility to the status of the one, reinforcing the impregnability and exclusivity of the studio. The third boundary is the line drawn around the exhibition, the border between showing and observing, the point of spoken and unspoken interpretation, the doorway that demands a shift to special behaviour; the disengagement of the visitor from the wider world to the status of the passive initiate. To cross this line is to discredit the exhibition's promise of inherent quality, to refuse the wish to explain or have things explained and to demand that the art experience be seen as inseparable from the everyday. Curating patrols this boundary, defending the idea that the inside and out are discrete spaces, explaining away ambiguity, doubt and the dialogical.

As discussed in chapter 2, at these boundaries curating is understood to be in crisis. In the context of an art world where the 'oldest modes of thought' (Deleuze & Guatarri, 1987, p. 13) are still clung on to for the sake of control, convenience and profit, curating, as a professional designation, can inevitably only support the constructs that form and inform it; those tied to the issues of institutional transparency, artistic originality and the public good. Identifying crises illuminates points from which to question and complicate the deep-rooted logics that these platitudes illustrate, to consider how best to work

with the possibility that institutions are by nature not transparent, artists not original and the public not in need of culturing. To undertake such a task is only possible if we question the professional terrain prescribed to curating, stepping outside it, while continuing to work with exhibitions. This is the real crisis, one of a poverty of imagination of how things might be different, and to all intents and purposes the reason why looking beyond these boundaries is so important. For certainly the challenge is to transgress the boundaries of curating (as profession) and explore the possibilities of the exhibition, reimagining our practice in relation to these. To do this is to understand crisis as an opportunity for critical activity and to undo in order to do anew. In Chapter 3 the discussion about itinerant identifications reveals that professional designations themselves by no means restrict our individual ability to transgress boundaries; freelance operators and artists do this all the time, dropping in and out for strategic effect and posing questions from liminal positions on the edge of institutional practice. However, there is no incidence at present in which curating itself can operate beyond its own terrain, or to put it another way, the curating talked about here is not defined by the actions of curators but is a direct product of a professional, social and economic context. For this reason, it has not been the aim of this study to suggest how curators, whether institutional or freelance, can make better exhibitions, nor to reveal to curators of both kinds the nature of their unavoidable political, commercial and moral expediency. The former would be to propagate the idea that the crisis necessarily needs solving, and the latter to state what is already widely known by those working in this field. Instead, the aim of establishing in which ways curating is always inevitably restrained has been to consider in which ways the exhibition, by nature of its public function, is potentially free from such restraint.

5.2 Communities of practice.

This study has proposed an alternative approach to the way we analyse exhibitions, one in which the focus is shifted from the terms of production to

those of the produced. The core terms in this analysis are collectivity (Rogoff, 2002), practice and learning. As part of this, familiar ways of assessing exhibitions have been incorporated into a predominantly temporal and performative understanding of how exhibitions evolve and are practiced. Attention has been paid to the way formal, spatial and content based decisions central to curatorial work may affect an exhibition's constitution but also to how, relative to other factors, they may not. Learning in groups and more specifically the question of how such groups negotiate and renegotiate their own sociability (Warner, 2002) are key to any such analysis. The group, whose connection to one another the study argues effectively constitute the exhibition, are necessarily diverse, made up of parties from both sides of the traditional producer/consumer divide and may not even see themselves as connected or in a learning experience. Yet precisely this contingent rather than conditional relationship between its members retains its emancipatory possibilities and defines its collective power. This is the 'equality of intelligence' (Rancière, 2007) that arises from acts of individual expression and interpretation in a shared domain, the exhibition, binding them together by the very fact that it marks them apart.

But the question remains as to how knowledge is produced in such disparate constellations, or to put it another way, as to what forms of learning actually arise as a result of participation in groups of this kind. The argument here is that received ideas about how we learn play a large part in the conception of how exhibitions generate meaning, and that only by revising this point of view can we accept the importance of the exhibition as a site of critical knowledge production rather than one of the reproduction of normative values. Integral to Warner's conception of 'counterpublics' is the importance of ongoing communication in the mutual negotiation of particular non-normative values. The characteristics of any public or counterpublic alike are the product of a group developing particular modes of address and sociability in relation to a shared activity. In the light of the analysis and the case studies this study argues that exhibitions of contemporary art are, by definition, sites of social learning, and as such, places where communication is continually

taking place and values being negotiated. Of course the characteristics of these exchanges and the values that emerge are to a greater or lesser extent dependent on the context and nature of the exhibition and the artworks within. In this sense, though relative to many other factors, curatorial activities remain of importance. As Warner makes clear, counterpublics differ from normative publics only in so far as they propose different ways of learning together. Warner's term 'counterpublic' can be compared to Oliver Marchart's use of 'non-programmatic learning' (Marchart, 2005) which he sees as linked to emancipatory pedagogy. In both cases there is a recognition that social learning is at the centre of such emancipatory practices, but that it is not the case that all publics engaged in social learning are exploring new ways of relating to one another. In short, contemporary art exhibitions, even those with a focus on participation, can still possess 'normative' and 'dominatory' characteristics.

In Chapter 3 of this study, a speculative attempt is made to model a paradigmatic view of the art world and consider alternatives. The purpose being to recognise that our understanding of context is key to our sense of what we are able to learn or mean and in what terms, and that inherited models for understanding context may be unhelpful and in need of revision. An image of the art world as a treelike structure or root-book with a centralised memory and hierarchical logic (Deleuze & Guatarri, 1987) is replaced in this study by one of the art world as a rhizome, with its qualities of heterogeneity, rupture, multiplicity and endless connectedness. With Rancière's compelling revision of spectatorship and emancipation in mind, simply reimagining the terms of connectedness or learning of an individual is not enough to argue for their emancipated status, or for the value of theatre or art per se. In their analysis of what they term communities of practice, Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that people can legitimately be attached to these, while remaining peripheral and that even legitimate peripheral participation denotes an intention to learn by taking part. This is a key point in relation to how exhibitions are constituted where a sense of community, in

a traditional sense, may appear absent but where even the most peripheral of participant/practitioners, by definition, possess intentionality.

5.3 Three experiments in collectivity.

The case studies described and analysed in Chapter 4 are key to this study because they reveal, in different ways, the complexity and unpredictability of the collaborative and collective activities that make up exhibition practice. In this detailed look at the projects, inconsistencies between curatorial aims and outcomes are exposed alongside divisions in opinion about their participatory nature. In hindsight the two selection criteria for these projects that appear particularly pertinent are the focus on freelance practice and the explicit socio-political and participatory aims of the exhibitions selected. In relation to the curators, the majority of whom are also artists, the analysis itself reflects on how in varying degrees it was their freelance relationship to the institutions they worked with that formed and influenced their non-traditional approaches to the idea of the exhibition and its public. While, perhaps as a result of this willingness to experiment, the collective aspects of organising, visiting and participating in the projects evolved in all cases beyond the scope of curatorial planning. It is also noted that these projects, which developed with a degree of independence from the spaces that housed them, involved participants from beyond the institution's usual frame of reference. In this sense, new communities of practice were built during the projects as well as existing ones being revealed by them, and in some cases co-opting them.

With an interest in modelling practice and defining core qualities of these projects in an understandable way, the analysis proposes a character for each of them; exhibition as game, exhibition as civil-society campaign and exhibition as workshop document. Of course, to reduce such projects to type is to risk supposing a universality of experience amongst participants or a singularity of narrative concerning the character of a project, something that

this analysis reveals as inappropriate. Furthermore, there is danger attached to imagining that such models, synthesised after the fact, might constitute a vocabulary for future projects. They might, and as such they may prove a helpful starting point, but only with the caveat that is contained in the knowledge that these models emerged in spite of curatorial wishes, rather than because of them. In the case of *I am a Curator* the objectives to democratise the curatorial process, and throw new light on the relationship between art-works, exhibitions and interpretation appear unrealised, but the game that emerged in their place, with its multiple negotiations of terms of engagement and exchange, provides a fascinating and even provocative picture of the possibilities of the exhibition format. The curatorial team of *Minority Report* were united in their objective to bring immigrant inhabitants and their potentially racist neighbours together to address and reflect upon the issue of racial intolerance. The project was successful in acting as a site, at that time unprecedented, for the networking of different immigrant populations and initiatives within the city and further afield. Yet the publics, as witnesses to these meetings, were almost without exception beforehand sympathetic to the immigrants' cause. An important part of the target public stayed away and the character of the project changed accordingly. The several constituent parts of *The Maghreb Connection* aimed to contribute to the emergence of what the curator termed a 'trans-national consciousness' (Biemann & Holmes, 2006, p. 7). The term seems fitting for the exchanges between the artists during the lengthy research period and the many connections they made to and between people in the Maghreb region over this time. Equally, the bilingual publication, with its interconnected selections of essays, reportage and images appear in keeping with this aim. However, in the exhibition, the expansive processes of collaboration are separated out into a row of distinct documentary works, and these retrospective accounts suggest closure rather than the wished for emergence.

Here then, models of this kind are helpful in considering the way in which the intentionality of the various participants is framed, negotiated and eventually constituted. It also allows us to synthesise an idea of what practice the

community are engaged in, be that as game-players, activists or documentarians and in all cases this is revealingly different to professed curatorial intentions. Overall the intention here is analysis of what has happened and interpretation of what that means, not a tidying up of necessarily messy processes or a presumption that particular models were *carried out*, which would be misleading. In fact, of primary interest in this process of analysis was attention to significant moments of connection, multiplicity and rupture that these exhibitions engendered in order to assess what is being negotiated and learned through the process.

Chapter 4 pays close attention to the moments in the exhibition projects when connections, ruptures and multiplicities are revealed. In the case of *I am a Curator*, the point at which Per Hüttner and Hannah Rickards refuse the work of Morten Goll and Joachim Hamou on the grounds that it restricts the freedoms of their gallery team. Later, during the exhibitions run, the moment at which they realise that their instructions to the Curators of the Day are over-conditioning the volunteers' ability to create interesting exhibitions. During *Minority Report* it is the moment where the curatorial team notice that streams of visitors are queuing to enter the Aarhus Art Museum to see the work of Olafur Eliasson, but that no one from the same public are stopping to see their exhibition, despite its proximity. Reflecting later on the visitors who attended the part of the *Minority Report* exhibition at the Aarhus art exhibition centre Helen Lykke-Møller describes the exhibition as academic and elitist, arguing that it attracted only the underground art scene of Aarhus, students and the friends and families of those immigrants directly involved in the project. In the publication accompanying the research and exhibition project *The Maghreb Connection*, Charles Heller recounts his hesitance at the moment when Ursula Biemann urges him to film migrants during a field trip to Morocco (Heller, 2006, p. 107). In a later interview about the two-year collaborative period that preceded the exhibition, Biemann makes clear that she could find no established artists willing to work for this amount of time on something 'that was not their own idea' (Biemann, 2007, Appendix 7). Seemingly slight,

anecdotal observations regarding the processes by which exhibitions are constituted often provide us with insights that undo the grand narratives of the finished product, which we find dominant in press releases, interpretative texts and curatorial manifestos. In the above examples the protagonists of the projects discussed in Chapter 4 can be observed in moments of encounter with the ends of curating, with the system of institutional controls and permissions, the populist rituals of cultural betterment, and the difficult terms of art's self-determination and autonomy. The usefulness of the new model for exhibition analysis arrived at in Chapter 3, considering as it does the question of what constitutes an exhibition rather than what it contains or is about, is that these issues of specialness, institutional power and social betterment remain present, but are reframed, not as truisms that inform exhibitions, but as the negotiable values within them.

5.4 Stop making sense.

This study has sought to relativise the importance of curating within our understanding of how exhibitions are constituted or practiced and of the processes of learning that such practice leads to. This assessment of the ends of curating is undertaken neither to support an idea of the importance of the artist, over and above the curator, nor to champion the public, over and above the art. In fact, in its lengthy enquiry into how we talk about curating, it reviews the development of both arguments, concerning creativity and authorship on the one hand and access on the other. It concludes that both debates are reliant on a particular understanding of the art world as divided into specific fixed roles, responsibilities and relationships to production. As such, the study sees the announcements of crisis in curating as illustrative of a field that understands itself in terms of inflexible hierarchies and binary divisions. In reaction to this an attempt is made to move from the generalised world of the curator, the artist and the public and to imagine the art world as a space of real connections between real people. The picture of the field that emerges is one of shifting hierarchies, co-participation, multiplicity and

exchange, symptomised by the itinerancy of individuals within a field of identifications that were once definitive. With this in mind, the process of relativising the importance of curating can be seen, perhaps obversely, as strengthening the field of exhibition practice.

To return to the question of the exhibition as a site of social learning, the curator's importance here is defined by their commitment to the life of a community of practice that an exhibition project engages or actively calls into existence. In the case studies examined here, these are temporary groupings, of which the artists, curators, their peers, other exhibition visitors, institutional workers, critics and anyone else who encounters the project are all an integral part. It is their joint activities that determine how an exhibition is constituted. To relativise curating in the way suggested here is neither to prescribe it a service role nor a pedagogical one, both of which would suggest that the curator is, in some way outside the community of practice. Quite the opposite, the curator is understood here as integrated into the community and aligned with its aim of learning together. The exhibition, though beyond curating, enfolds the curator in its community by the very fact of their learning.

The curator may presuppose an ability to influence members of these communities through their actions within this joint endeavour, whether defining where in a space work should be placed or publishing a text explaining how these same works should be understood. They may believe that by initiating the project they necessarily have some form of a leading role in associated communities of practice. They may even develop a complex model in their own minds of how an exhibition works and what it means, and imagine that their success depends on how many of the members support them in this view. Yet the argumentation and analysis here maintain that the most powerful learning experiences within the community are taking place in parallel to curatorial activity rather than as a result of it. We can better understand the activities the curator undertakes and sees as defining an exhibition as a performance of their own terms of intentionality within the

broader community of practice. Other members perform their own intentionality in other ways and these are, within an understanding of the exhibition experience, of equal importance to that of the curator. As such the challenge for the curator is to distance themselves from the notion that a successful exhibition hinges on their ability to make sense of art for the benefit of others. The distance between the sanctioned image of the curator educating their audience and the image of the community of practice learning together, posited here, is illustrated by the claim that the life of the exhibition begins where the curating ends.

The thesis presents people curating exhibitions with a dilemma, because it argues for the importance of the process they are centrally engaged in, while illustrating their only peripheral importance in what is being produced. It is hard for the curator to stop making sense. This dilemma is at the centre of the shift in theoretical thought regarding curatorial work discussed in Chapter 4 and perhaps best represented by the relationship between Marion Von Osten's question (2005, 2008) of whether exhibition making can constitute a counterpublic strategy? and Jacques Rancière's observations on the nature of spectatorship and emancipation that 'The common power is the power of the equality of intelligence' (Rancière, 2007). Warner is clear that counterpublics only differ from their normative counterparts in so far as they 'try to supply different ways of imagining stranger sociability and its reflexivity' (Warner, 2002, pp. 121-122). Thus, if interested in exploring the possibilities discussed in this study, exhibition making needs to provide the space for precisely such alternative imaginings. However, establishing that the curator's task may be linked to such provision is not synonymous with the idea that the remit for curating has shifted from producing exhibitions to producing publics. In fact, engagement with what such a space might be, calls for a revision of the very understanding of production in the curatorial field. The evocation of communities of practice is the final step in this study's attempt to conclude how such a space for alternative imaginings might function, a space of learning through practice. However, this is not a case of establishing a community along preconceived collective lines, because the

equality necessary for such a space to function is neither that denoted by membership rituals alone nor the faux-equality suggested by agreeing on things, but the equality of intelligence performed by the members themselves in their mutual but separate interpretation of their surroundings. It is the co-recognition of their individual subjectivity and intentionality that we can define as emancipated, within and in relation to a given context, in this case, the exhibition.

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Appendix 1

Interview with Per Hüttner & Gavin Wade

November 2004

Re: *I am a Curator*

Barnaby Drabble: Per, do you think you can briefly describe the exhibition *I am a Curator*?

Per Huttner: The original idea was to invite members of the public to come each day of the project and, during one afternoon, put together an exhibition at the Chisenhale. I made sure that these slots would be made available as democratically as possible, divided between different people from different backgrounds and ages. Interestingly this focus of the project changed as it progressed and each session became more focussed on the artwork that was made available for the participants to curate. Increasingly the curator of the day would reflect on the questions and problems that they wanted to approach and use these artworks as a resource to do this. This change of focus was partially practical because to fill a space that is almost three hundred square meters in four and a half hours is not an easy task, and for the first exhibitions people were just running around shouting 'look we just need to get this up'. We fairly immediately understood that this strict focus on the finished exhibition didn't work and that a looser model with more preparation for the curators of the day, was working the best.

Because I didn't want the curator of the day to curate my taste, I asked five other people to select works that the invited curators could select from for their show. In the end there were fifty-seven artists from seventeen countries that were part of the exhibition. In addition to this selection process there were also other elements in the exhibition itself like the Support Structure that Gavin will talk about later, the interface cards that Scott Rigby designed and the gallery crew. At the beginning of the day the fifty-seven artworks were packed into the support structure, and it was very hard to get an overview. The interface cards had an image and a description of each artwork so when the curator of the day came in in the morning we sat down at the table with them and basically laid out all the cards, they were also viewable on the website, and most people had printed them out and came in with their own pack. The gallery crew were responsible for both handling the work and also leading the curator of the day through the process of realising their exhibition. To avoid damage we didn't want the actual curator of the day to handle the work, a point of a lot of frustration but a necessary precaution when doing thirty six shows in six weeks. The gallery crew were a pool of roughly fifteen volunteers, mostly art students or curating students, headed by Hannah Rickards who was in there every day.

BD: Regarding the title of the exhibition. In your published thoughts and projects you said 'Contrary to what the title suggests the project had little to

do with curating'. If so, why did you decide to call the exhibition *I am a Curator*?

PH: Well there are two things I need to say to that. Number one is that we were toying with a lot of different titles for the show that more explicitly dealt with the complexity of the project, but those titles were not very straight forward, and given the people we wanted to involve, we decided on something that was kind of catchy. The statement that you quote is also very important, because I wanted to make it clear in the catalogue that I am an artist, who is interested in curation from an artist's point of view and that I make no claims to doing a curators job.

BD: In the exhibition, as you have described, members of the public were invited to arrange pre-selected art works or art objects in the gallery space. How would you respond to the criticism that this represents a very particular or very traditional approach to the idea of how an exhibition might be made? What about the questions of commissioning artists or being involved in the initial selection. How did you feel about perhaps presenting an imaginary choice, but at the same time restricting the possibilities that a normal curator might have?

PH: I think that there are many different answers to your question really, I do agree, when you are faced with the possibility of just selecting existing art work that is a very traditional take on what a curator is. But then again, I think that *I Am A Curator* tried to do something that goes beyond that. By using a very traditional approach it enabled us to do something that was extremely creative and which opened new ideas about how to put together exhibitions. In terms of selecting the works, It wasn't as if they had only five pieces to choose from. To consider the work of fifty-seven artists in one afternoon is a major task. Also, a lot of the work was not finished, it was up to the curator of the day to complete it, a lot was interactive, and a lot had different elements that needed to be put together. So there were many different approaches on offer, reflecting the working methods of the original selectors. You could also read the text that each of these people had written about their selection, and these were often dealing with this interactive aspect.

One thing that interested me was the question of the opening of the exhibition. Presumably nothing had been achieved at the moment of the opening, why didn't you do a closing instead?

PH: Well I wanted an opening and I felt it was really important. Basically, in the central space we had the Support Structure with all the work in it, and then the doors were open and we had the interface cards mounted on the inside of the doors so visitors could virtually browse all the work that was there. I thought there was something extremely poetic and strong in imagining the array of infinite possibilities that could take place in the coming six weeks.

BD You variously described *I am a Curator* as a 'solo exhibition, one project by one artist' and 'a collaborative experiment'. And you have already mentioned that you are coming into this as an artist and not as a curator. Can you tell me how you see these contrasting or conflicting models of authorship, functioning within the project? What was the response of your collaborators to your very clear insistence that this was a solo show by Per Hüttner?

PH: Well, collaboration is a cornerstone of my artistic practice, no matter what I do. It's always based on collaboration in one way or another. And for me there is no contradiction and no conflict between these different models. I think that they coexist very harmoniously. And also even in the historical perspective I think that all the great artists have been collaborators and every good artist makes use of the people around them, even if it is just a case of conversation or dialogue. Concerning my insistence on calling this a solo show, I think that that all worked out very well. There were jokes that were made about me being the 'über-curator'; and hogging the limelight. But I think that everyone felt that there was room for their participation and that their input into the project was recognised and made visible. If anything, I should have probably been a lot firmer about the fact that it was my solo exhibition. But that is easy to say in retrospect.

BD: In an historical moment where curators who introduce creative strategies in their dealing with art and exhibition are heavily critiqued for assuming authorial positions, do you feel that there is a fundamental difference if you do this as an artist?

PH: I think there is, because there is a fundamental understanding of collaborative process among artists and perhaps also between artists and curators who have come from an art making background. To my mind there is a different expectation with people who have come from an art-historical background or those who have trained as curators. It is a big claim and goes against common knowledge, but my experience of artists is that for them it is not always necessary to be in the limelight. There is more fundamental trust in the work at hand and the roles emerge from that. Naturally, among the participating artists there was a slight concern that their work would not be seen, simply because there was such a number of works in the show. As each show, each day, was different their doubts were in some way valid, the work wasn't seen by as many people as it would have been seen if it was on the wall all the time. But it is also, what I kept saying this at the time, that the people who saw it, saw it very differently because they had to think about where it came from and how it was placed in the context of other artwork. There was a more profound understanding and viewing of the works than in a normal show. And that kind of goes with my ideology about art; that it is better to be seen by few people who really see it, than to be seen by lots of people who just glance at the work.

BD: Gavin, you were involved in this project *I am a Curator*, on the invitation of Per you provided a structure to support the exhibition. Can you briefly outline what Support Structure is?

GW: Support Structure changes all the time, but how it actually panned out in the exhibition was a physical structure that played host to all of the artworks. It had six sections for the six different selections of work; from the five invited selectors and Per. It was movable, exactly as wide as the gallery so you could turn the rectangle of the gallery into a square or a corridor, whatever was required. So it introduced another set of spatial strategies for the daily curator to use as well, by providing a gallery within a gallery, a tool to develop ideas while you were in the space, in addition to the art works in the exhibition.

PH: Support Structure became very much the aesthetic part of *I am a Curator* because it was always there and it was very big, it became a visual marker for the exhibition and particularly when you go through the documentation you see lots of different permutations of how Support Structure was used.

GW: I agree, but I would like to think that the concept of support structure was broader than what was physically there, and I think that you understood that when you came to use it. We wanted to make a structure that informed you and led you to do certain things, and provide a tool that was able to critique the exhibition, to deal with ideas of curating and to deal with all aspects of exhibition making, including the production of art. That concept was developed very strongly out of my previous work and as a response to Per's invitation to come up with the best thing possible for this exhibition called *I am a Curator*. We contemplated how to add to it, how to be of value and how to make the daily curators aware of what they were doing.

BD: Can you describe your work with the architect Celine Condorelli in relation to *Support Structure*. Did you come up with the idea prior to Per's invitation?

GW: The idea for *Support Structure* existed before Per's exhibition, but in a very different form. I saw it initially as an exhibition, a display of devices, structures and systems that had been used throughout recent history. I was interested in producing a wooden bench that went around a pillar that Lawrence Weiner used for naked models to stand on in one of his films. I wanted to make elements of walls that were constructed originally for the Museum of Modern Art to display works by Jackson Pollock and Barnett Newman. The idea was to have a whole array of say forty different structures, in a way an archive, a reproduction and also a curatorial artwork. I got in touch with the architect Celine Condorelli after Per contacted me and together we began to start thinking about designing some sort of facilitating system for the exhibition. I wanted to push beyond the knowledge and experience that I had already gathered working on other projects, so I invited Celine to collaborate with me on *I am a Curator* but also beyond.

PH: This was symptomatic of what happened in *I am a Curator*, in that I asked people to contribute with something slight and everyone kind of took it beyond what the original pitch was. Basically, I asked Gavin to design a shelving structure and he came back with *Support Structure*, which went way way beyond that.

GW: In relation to this I have to say that I disagree that this was a collaborative project. Per was the director of the project and he invited me to provide a service. To do this I collaborated with Celine but not with Per, although his ideas and his invitation provided my context. This was really a case of a commissioner and a brief, so for me there wasn't collaboration between us as such.

BD: So *I am a Curator* was potentially less a collaborative project and more a project of collaborations?

PH: Yes, maybe.

BD: I wanted to talk about what happened beyond *I am a Curator*, what other things has *Support Structure* supported?

GW: From the beginning one of our goals was that *Support Structure* should become an interface, and we wanted to become more of a general interface than something that would just be exhibition design. We soon set up four other sites around the UK that we would go to as *Support Structure*. We aimed to take the gallery system that we produced for *I am a Curator* to the other sites and evolve that, letting it develop in relationship to whatever the site was. The next site was the Economist Building, there has been a gallery run there for the past fifteen years or so and I was interested in that site as one that had been adapted for showing art but that wasn't particularly good as a gallery site. In our work there we dealt with that change of function and proposed a further change of function for the site. On the one hand we aimed to deal with the business activities in the building and on the other the more general context of Alison and Peter Smithson's architecture. The building is one of the best examples of modernist 1960's architecture in Britain, and was meant to resemble a miniature city, a concept that interested us and formed the starting point of the support we offered.

This is just one example, and I would like to briefly mention the others. After the Economist Plaza we went to support a multi-cultural group in Portsmouth, a context entirely outside the art world. They offered us a very precise brief to come up with a new shape for their multi-cultural festival. Portsmouth led to Greenham Common, where the brief was to develop the interpretation of the common, in the light of its recent change of status. It was a public common for a few hundred years and in the 1940's was taken over by the military during the Second World War. In 1980, or there about, it became an American base and controversially housed nuclear missiles, and only three or four years ago was it given back to the public. We are now

exploring a further two sites for *Support Structure* and as such it is an ongoing, evolving project.

BD: You mentioned how the initial idea was to take the structure which you had at the Chisenhale Gallery and adapt that, was that eventually the case?

GW: Yes but only partially. In the Economist Building we used all parts of the physical structure for *I am a Curator*, but adapted it. We took some parts away, but the main frame of the structure was still there, split into two and converted it into two office units instead. The structure hosted Celine and myself as we were in residency there throughout the duration of the project. In Portsmouth the only physical element we used was Unit E, which became the multi-cultural archive. This we left with the multi-cultural group as some kind of legacy. That triggered an idea that has become a part of the 'Support Structure' concept: to leave parts at different sites. That is also kind of what has happened at Greenham, although we haven't used any of the actual elements from the Chisenhale we have produced a new, much larger space there, including a bill-board structure, which we originally imagined for *I am a Curator*.

BD: I wanted to ask you about this definition of support, which is in the title of your project. In respect to an 'active' term like intervention, how passive is your definition of 'support' here?

GW: I don't imagine that it is passive, but I think it could be. The support could be quite understated and hidden, something you are actually not even aware of it. *Support Structure* at the Chisenhale was a huge thing, but somehow it was taken for granted. It is interesting that at the same time as being taken for granted it could actually program you to do certain things. That for me is then an underlying concern for a curator, you need to imagine that there are some programmable aspects of what you can do, but you don't know what they all are. You set up a system to interrogate this.

BD: Both *Support Structure* and *I am a Curator* have been described in terms of their 'playfulness'. I'm interested in the possibilities of understanding the exhibition as a game and the idea of the viewer as player, but also concerned with whether these strategies lead us towards prescriptive interactivity and a lack of seriousness. Do you see a conflict there or do you think that these ideas can co-exist?

GW: Well I don't think the exhibition and the things that I have talked about are a game as such, but I think they are resolutely 'play'. The big difference is that with a game there is one goal, there is one outcome and one way of winning, and with open play, there are structures and rules and systems but there is no singular goal.

PH: I think also that this show was truly interactive because when the curator of the day came in, they were given this resource, and three people working for them the whole day. By 'true interactivity' I mean opposing the 'push

button' mentality, which can be seen as pseudo-interactivity, and actually offering people a chance to create something themselves. This is what the exhibition offered, the space was virtually empty when you came in and you really had to interact with it. One of the curators of the day even came in and said, 'we're just going to spend the whole day discussing which work is going to be in the show'. The day was spent in a democratic discussion where everyone had to vote. This was a very deliberate creative choice, 'we're not going to show anything'. This shows how *I am a Curator* raised questions about the idea of the elitism of art, in particular questions having to do with access, democracy and the roles of the artists, the beholder and the curator.

BD: Yes, I have a question about that, in both *I am a Curator* and *Support Structure* you have both made clear your wish to involve 'non-art world people'. Can you explain your reasons for choosing to involve audiences who have little knowledge of contemporary art in these projects? What, in your eyes, is the difference between art world people and non-art world people?

GW: With *Support Structure*, the impulse is to test an idea. Our idea was, can we take the idea of support and evolve it, not just for the benefit of art, but for the benefit of life. We had to take it out of the art world to do this. The impulse was to see what art could do in other types of situations that I had no experience of. I see no major differences between the art world audience and others, but there may be differences in motivation of why they want certain things and what they are interested in dealing with. I think there is also an issue relevant to curating here. Predominantly curators work with people that are self-motivated to produce art, but with experiments like *Support Structure*, we approach people with no clear motivation in this direction and ask simply 'How can we support you?' With the emergence of a brief, and our response to that, expectations are reversed and the fact that the outcome might be described as art is often surprising and problematic for those we support.

PH: I think I come from a very different angle when it comes to the non-art world audience because in my artistic-curatorial practice I am dealing with exactly the same issues that I do in my photographic practice. My photographic work is always shot in busy public spaces, and I am putting myself in this situation in order to raise issues about vulnerability, but also about the role of the artist, about what is staged and what is real. I am interested in different layers of reality, as perceived by different kinds of people. This goes also for *I am a Curator*, where working with different members of the public can be seen as a learning process, as much for me as for them. Most of my time in art school was spent collaborating with scientists, particularly people involved in medical research. My initial aim was to prove that art could be as precise and exact as science. After a few years I realised that it was the other way around, that science is exactly as haphazard as art. It is just that the rules that apply are viewed differently and inscribed in different systems of evaluation. What I learnt from this experience was the value of appropriating parts of the methodology of

science, and I think that I use that a lot in my work. I want to find stuff out; my works are steps in this research, experiments along the way.

BD: The scale and complexity of both projects suggest that they are labour intensive, involve long timescales and as a result require relatively large budgets. What do these considerations suggest for the planning of future projects of this kind? Is this intensity manageable within current structures for supporting art practice?

GW: To my mind, there just isn't enough out there to sustain a huge number of practitioners working in this way. It's clear to me that with *Support Structure*, we actually needed double the budget that we had and I needed to give myself double the amount of time that I had. This makes you question how important the project is, what the outcomes are, are they worth the time and money invested in them. I think that is probably what I am dealing with now. I am trying to work out if other methods might have been more productive in dealing with say the multi-cultural issue, or the issue of public ownership of land.

PH: Well, all my work is about pain, and there is a level of masochism involved in the way that I approach my projects. I think you need to make these labour intensive, crazy, insane, projects in order to find out what it is that you want and need to do as an artist. Once you have arrived at this, it is not an end point, but a starting point, maybe then, and only then you can start to be more selective.

GW: I guess I agree. Each phase of *Support Structure* has been a big investment, primarily because each phase raises very new challenges, but by the end of each stage we have developed a set of tools, either as concepts or physical products. Now we have been commissioned to do a new phase, and the brief that we received for that was quite similar to a combination of some of the other briefs from previous phases and as a result we are able to deal with it very efficiently. So suddenly what we have been doing becomes clear: we have been setting up, making priming tools and developing prototypes. We have been learning to support. What also becomes clear is how as this project progresses it strays further from art, I think we are producing architecture now, and for the last phase we were thinking of a retail site in Birmingham, so we would end up with a clear link to this idea of designing a product. I am quite happy with this evolution; in fact I am fascinated by it. What we might be able to do at some stage is present *Support Structure* like an autonomous toolbox. It's like; 'Here is our kit – give us something to do. We are going to support you wherever.'

Appendix 2

Interview with Celine Condorelli

20th January 2007

Re: *I am a Curator*

Barnaby Drabble - what is the current status of your ongoing project *Support Structure*?

Celine Condorelli - First of all *Support Structure* is becoming quite old in a way, it's now three years old, which means that it has matured through different manifestations. One of the initial remits was to put *Support Structure* through a learning process by applying it to different sites. There was the art site, the corporate site, the political site, the educational site and the community site.

BD - did you make this list of sites during the preconception of *Support Structure*, or is it something that transpired?

CC - All the venues were lined up beforehand except the educational site, which was a project we got half way through when Essex University invited us to be artists in residence for their 40th anniversary. Phase six, which is what we are working on at the moment, is a publication. After engaging in this territory of support actively, through practice and production, we realized that neither art nor architecture have actually produced any theory that concerns the notion of support; be it about space and people or art and people. No architect has ever written about scaffolding for example. Also in terms of framing devices, one of the only things I have found is Derrida on the paragon / the supplement. The idea of the publication is that in the absence of an existing bibliography we must produce it ourselves. We are partly commissioning, partly collecting and partly producing a bibliography of support.

BD - how does this relate to the first five stages is there an idea that the sixth will document those?

CC - No, we are really thinking about methodology. Support is very much about the how rather than the what, so the idea is to break down the project into a methodology for production and action. We would like it to be used as a manual.

BD - Can you tell me about how *Support Structure* stage one was conceived, when you supported the exhibition *I am a Curator*?

CC - Gavin Wade and I met through Kathrin Böhm, who organised a workshop at the time when Gavin was doing a project about urban space called *Lets Get to Work*. I was invited to this workshop and Gavin and I had similar interests about the way things happen, in a very basic sense. I was very interested in the relationship between architecture and politics and was

working on a big scale; consulting for city councils, thinking about urbanism based on movement etc, while Gavin was working on the relationship between particularly recognisable structures and the politics of art-spaces. He was fascinated with Frederick Kiesler's L and T type display units; provoking devices that are not quite the art piece, but the site where the art takes place. So we met with similar interests but on completely different scales, and as an artist and an architect we had particular expectations of each other. Gavin, for example, thought that he needed to work with an architect who could design the engineering of devices like Kiesler's.

BD - why did he reason that he needed an architect for this, was it something about scale?

CC - I think it was about scale and about particular modes of distribution and production that he wanted to push further than what he knew. We were both thinking about collaboration in the terms that working with someone allows you to go that bit further with your own practice, and also further in terms of expertise and influence, authorship and medium. Gavin had worked with Per Hüttner previously, and initially Per asked him to provide a storage unit for the art works that would be in the exhibition *I am a Curator*. Gavin got back to Per, saying that he would like to develop the project further and think about the work of mediation together with me. We used an ISA grant to think about how to develop this project and it very quickly became obvious that we weren't going to do some shelves and a table, but that we were really interested in how the show would function and what its interfaces could be. I first met Per at the Chisenhale when we had the first meeting to talk about the show in Spring 2003.

BD - So your work was very closely related to this commission. How open was Per to the extent of your intervention, which was bigger than he had originally planned. Was he completely open to all suggestions or did he have specific things he wanted to see taking place?

CC - For me the work was completely related to a commissioning logic, but strangely enough Per was very open and trusting about the nature of this. After we argued our position he accepted quite quickly that this piece, *Support Structure*, could be both a work in the show and a tool for helping how the show worked. However, he was really concerned that it would be visually too loud and he felt that we couldn't over design it or it would interfere with the way that people were able to interact with the show. Strangely enough what we eventually produced was unbelievably loud, a quite monstrous thing actually, but nobody ever thought about why it looked the way it did. There was a survey at the end of each day where the curator of the day had to fill in some forms to talk about how the exhibition worked or didn't, including how it was facilitated, and I think one person mentioned *Support Structure*. So it seems that the structure completely disappeared and from an architectural point of view this was kind of surprising.

BD - Was it *Support Structure*'s functional nature that made it in some way

invisible?

CC - This is something about invisibility, functional things fall into a hierarchy that mean they are understood as not as important as what people think the focus is, in this case the art in the exhibition itself. Although of course everything in the gallery was conditioned by the way *Support Structure* worked, or didn't work; the way in which it failed.

BD - You mentioned that you found Per's openness to the intervention made by *Support Structure* strange, why was this the case?

CC - As an architect working mostly in the art world, most of the attitudes I encounter are resistant to the idea of changing the fabric of the gallery itself. There is a standard white box that is predominant in the art world. It is for the most part minimalist architects who design art galleries these days, Tony Fretton and David Chipperfield for example, and they have set up a particular standard. I have worked with smaller galleries in London since and found that, on a basic and trivial level, arguing that not every surface needs to be white and not every angle 90 degrees is surprisingly difficult. With Per things were slightly different because we didn't want to touch the gallery and the proposal was not to adjust the architectural fabric, but instead to make a piece for the show. Per did check with us during the process what this thing was looking like, and we kept sending him sketches and drawings. But most people don't understand architectural drawings, and sometimes you can use this to your own advantage; you can hide things.

BD - You mention the drawings, and this brings to mind a question about collaboration. How did you develop the *Support Structure* together with Gavin? Who did what in the process? Was there a division of labour?

CC - Well I actually drew the thing. But although we made decisions along the way about what it had to do, we never decided what it would look like. In fact we wanted to work as functionally as possible and wanted a product that neither of us could recognize as our own. But, we knew what it had to do and how it had to perform. It needed to remain a performative object.

BD - If you made the drawings, I take it that the aesthetic questions were eventually solved by you?

CC - No, but maybe the first design. I drew a plan, which was the first manifestation of how it was going to work. There was a direct translation between how the show was structured to how the piece worked; six curators meant six panels, six surfaces for exhibition, six storage units for all the work. The structure was also the width of the gallery allowing people to adjust how big or small the exhibition space would be. So the drawings were a straightforward process of translation to begin with and then the adjustments we made to this first manifestation we did together. We chose the paint colour according to a history of gallery colours and the surfaces were chosen both in terms of building materials; from the wood that is used to cast

concrete, to soft and hard insulation board, and in terms of relation to history; to Lissitsky's surfaces for his *Room for Constructive Art*. Together this allowed visually ambiguous surfaces to appear.

BD – I note that you reference Lissitsky, and know of Gavin's long-term fascination with his work. Were you happy to take some of the design leads from Gavin's interests which preceded your collaboration?

CC - Sure, more than happy actually, because this is when references become really crucial in your work, they are like gifts from someone. One way we often work together is that Gavin brings something to the table and I go off and do something with it, or the other way around. We are very reactive. But to return to our differences and our original expectations, I am much more conceptual than Gavin thought, and he is much more of designer than I had expected. This can be quite funny in terms of the difference between how we actually work and what people think we do. There is this huge assumption about what architects do and what artists do and quite often, as in our case, it is exactly the opposite.

BD - could you spend time in the space during the exhibition to observe how support structure was used?

CC - Yes, we went on a regular basis, in fact I went almost every day because I live very close and I could easily pass by. One day I worked as a gallery assistant precisely in order to be part of the entire process and to be able to assess it. There was a booking system for people to curate a show and be part of the project and my brother sent in a proposal without telling me. So one day I went to the gallery and my brother was there curating a show. I ended up spending the day with him.

BD - through these experiences what was your assessment of Support Structure in its first manifestation as part of *I am a Curator*?

CC - Most interesting for me was the fact that, once built, I didn't recognize the structure. I really had never thought about what this thing was going to look like, which I know sounds a little strange. During the lead up to the exhibition we kept on going to the work shop, but the structure grew out of so many decisions that came along the way that when it was finished and standing in the space it was the most bizarre object. This was strange but also empowering because at such points you realise that the work can go a little further than what you can articulate by yourself. I remember being quite helpless in front of it. On the night of the opening, at which Per had made the decision to leave all the work in the *Support Structure*, meaning that there was effectively nothing to see, Gavin and I really couldn't deal with it and we ended up standing outside thinking 'God, what is this thing?'

BD - It would seem that there are two things to reflect upon regarding this moment of not recognising your own production, the first and probably the most obvious is that this is what happens with collaboration, and the second

is that this may have something to do with strictly following function - would you agree?

CC - Yes, and this was the moment that it became invisible, which in a way was the proof that it worked. People used it without thinking about it, and in fact it got used so much that it started breaking down, the wheels came off because people were wheeling it up and down so much and even climbing on it. Trying not to be precious about it, we had to realise that through its being destroyed you can tell that it is being used, that it was useful and that people were having fun with it.

BD - in addition to this personal assessment were you involved in the questions posed in the questionnaire?

CC - No not really, but we were asked in advance how we thought it could be evaluated. This is a question I often have for projects that involve, for lack of a better word, participation. It is very difficult to recognize how successful or unsuccessful such work is because most of the things you are measuring are things like appropriation and ownership, all things that you cannot really see. You can only see them through the traces of use over a longer period of time, but this is second hand knowledge never first hand, which is quite interesting both in terms of art and architecture. With a project that demands deeper engagement and a closer relationship between the people and the work, the smaller the audience the more participatory it is. You can't really participate with 500 people at the same time. In terms of scale I find this quite interesting.

BD - After being battered around for a month, parts of this structure were reused in the later stages. Was that always an intention, to recycle some of the elements?

CC - No, this came through the process of *I am a Curator*, in the sense that we decided that the structures knowledge should be accumulative and this was best suited by everything being recycled. We never threw anything away, but we adjusted it, cut it in half, added different doors, and even turned it at one point into two mobile offices for the residency at the Economist building. We liked the idea of the learning process as accumulation, the fact that you might cover up but you never forget, and in reference to not being able to recognize your own production, the knowledge that you never start from scratch but simply make adjustments to existing knowledge.

Appendix 3

Interview with Morten Goll

Conducted via Internet telephony on, 17th December 2008

Re: *I am a Curator*

Barnaby Drabble: What encouraged you to take part in the project *I am a Curator*, and how did this come about?

Morten Goll: Per (Hüttner) approached me and asked if I wanted to participate in this show, which he described as a collaboration between about 50-60 artist and the audience. I think he asked me in particular to consider the relations between audience and gallery staff.

BD: Why do you think Per approached you? Do you have a background in this kind of work?

MG: Yes indeed. Since 1999 I have worked with audience interactive strategies and community mobilizing. As you probably know, "social design" or "relational aesthetics" has been quite popular in Scandinavia since the early 1990s. A lot of my projects have concentrated upon the structuring of a social platform, which allows the participators to search or develop their own identities through a collective dialog in which the participants can function on equal terms. It is a kind of experimental democracy.

BD: You chose to involve Joachim Hamou in your response to Per's request, why?

MG: Joachim is a colleague of mine, who is a video artist and a theatre-director. I involved him because I didn't have much experience in video production, and I had this idea of an instructional video for the gallery crew, which should be presented in the show. I think it was the first time I worked with him, but not the last. Due to his knowledge from the theatre world, and his general sensitivity as a human being, I have found him a valuable partner in the different social experiments that we have staged later, mostly as TV shows on the artist run station tv-tv.

BD: Together you went on to produce a training video for the so called Gallery Crew. What did this contain and what approach did it train them in?

MG: First I designed an outrageous uniform for the crew. It was sort of a poncho made out gabardine. The idea was that the crew, when wearing it, would have to reconsider their social position whenever they encountered new audience (because of the awkwardness of wearing this costume in front of strangers) A kind of Brechtian "estrangement". My hope was to bring an element of humour to the audience/crew encounter. Also, the idea was to make the crew act as servants for the audience (poncho's are low class clothing for Mexican peasants). I believed that it was necessary to underline this "servant role", because of the nature of show. The video is a practical step-by-step instruction to the gallery crew, which proposes a strategy of how

to engage the audience in becoming a curator of the show. In the beginning it was my project, but as we continued I realized that Joachim was not just a hired director, but influenced the movie to a degree that we finally both became the authors. One of the big problems of the show in general, was that the claim to be a democratic experiment, or a project which handed over responsibility to the audience, is a shallow gesture, when you consider the name on the poster: the promised collaboration was presented as a solo show.

BD: I would like to come to the problems associated with per's authoring of the project later, and stick for now to the work you proposed and the reactions to it. The gallery crew refused to wear the ponchos, did you get a chance to discuss with them why this was the case?

MG: Well, as I recall, they didn't refuse to wear them. Per and the director of the gallery got very nervous when they saw the video and the ponchos. There was a crisis right before the opening, where they discussed if they could accept any of them at all. The young gallery staff (which were supposed to wear them) actually liked the ponchos. Finally, I just decided to wear one of the ponchos at the opening night, and before long all three ponchos were on display, as two staff members decided to go against their director and support the piece. My recollection from conversations with staff members is that they liked our project a lot. But since their superiors did not, they had a hard time figuring out what to do.

BD: When you say director of the gallery, do you mean Hannah Rickards the gallery manager? or was someone else opposed to the ponchos?

MG: Hannah Rickards sounds right. I remember trying to suggest a compromise to her and Per, to hang the ponchos in the show (on nails) to make it voluntary if the staff would use them. They should then be hung next to the screening of the video, since the two together was a demonstration of a suggested strategy. But she actually removed the ponchos herself, from the entrance wall, where we proposed to hang them.

BD: What was Per Hüttner's role in all this? As commissioner of the project, did he argue for or against the use of the video and ponchos?

MG: He was very worried about both. He started talking about sweatshirts with logos, which could be produced real quick. He was not angry like the Hannah, but clearly he disliked them. I guess that today I understand him, since our contribution was quite critical of the project. However, we really tried to do a constructive critique, with suggestions of how to make it possible to actually follow the words of the concept. A grown up democracy understands that critique is essential to it's survival and improvement. But as we pointed out, this version was flawed, and instead of disproving the allegations they confirmed them by their actions

BD: What was your reaction when it became clear that your contribution was

being censored and deemed as unsuitable?

MG: First I didn't believe my own ears, since I think that our contribution was the one that really took the concept of the show seriously. I mean, they should have loved it, because it expanded and complemented their own discourse. After that I got angry and we tried to negotiate... finally we were clearly disappointed but also somewhat proud, since, in a way, we had foreseen the problematic, as we had actually already described it in the video. It was just much more profound than we had imagined (after all, as you said, he had commissioned me, and he should know what I stand for).

BD: I am thinking about this issue of commissioning in relation to collaboration. Per often refers to the others involved in this project as collaborators, but few really seem to have developed things together with him. To your mind, was this a commission or a collaboration?

MG: That's a good question, in a way I accepted the commission because he presented it as a collaboration and that's why we made such a site-specific piece. But we did not collaborate with Per during conceptualization or production. It was his idea to ask me to produce uniforms. But I remember that I told him that I wanted free hands and absolute integrity, which he accepted (at first).

BD: You say that the project was flawed, and suggest that your contribution was an attempt to reprogram the project, from the inside as it were, to reveal and perhaps bypass the flaw? I like this idea, it relates to issues of agonism and the evolution of democratic systems rather than those strictly interested in maintaining the status-quo. Where do you see the flaw in the project?

MG: Well, I'm not sure we should use the word democracy (since I don't remember if Per used it) - but I do think we can analyze the project on parameters like shared authorship and audience empowerment (your words). As for the idea of shared authorship, the show was a joke, since only one name hit the poster. In terms of audience empowerment, it's more complicated: If you tell people that they have freedom of choice, the context in which this choice is made is essential to the degree of actual freedom. So many aesthetic choices were already made long before the audience could enter, and my critique is that the audience was presented to a number of highly staged not so free choices. Also, keep in mind that six curators were asked to select artwork, which could then be rearranged by audience curators at will. This way of handling artwork is an extremely conservative one. First, professional curators make sure that we have real quality art in the show (and the audience gets to play with others choices). Then each curator's selection is disregarded, the contextualization erased, and a new amateur curator is free to recontextualize. The didactic conclusion of this process is closer to an old-fashioned connoisseur ideology (the Work of the Male Master which lives on through the times into eternity) than to Per's claims to an interest in shared authorship and participatory strategies. Finally, if you want to produce an environment, or a platform, for collaborative process, dialogue and

participation between people who from the outset are internalized into a highly specific social hierarchy (gallery crew, artists, curators, audience), then you have to make a real effort to actually erase or at least address the nature of that hierarchy in order to eliminate its negative consequences. That's what we addressed in the video and ponchos.

BD: The press release refers to the project as an "experiment in democratising the curatorial process". Whether these are Per's words or not I don't know. In regard to your point about the one name on the poster, why do you think Per authored the show in this way?

MG: When asked, he told me that the gallery would not accept a group show. In my view, that would have been a perfect excuse to reject the gallery, or produce an actual solo show.

BD: He actually called it a solo show in the publicity and ensuing catalogue. When asked by me about this he replied (quote) "Concerning my insistence on calling this a solo show, I think that that all worked out very well. There were jokes that were made about me being the 'über-curator'; and hogging the limelight. But I think that everyone felt that there was room for their participation and that their input into the project was recognised and made visible. If anything, I should have probably been a lot firmer about the fact that it was my solo exhibition." I feel this led to many misunderstandings, what do you think?

MG: Yes, how do you convince 55 artists and 6 curators that they should put their work in a solo show? The only real problem with this show was that it was based on false marketing. If you claim to be into experiments in democratic processes, you set the stakes high: failure is not only a just another bad show, it is an insult to the one principle that can save mankind from itself. I am not a religious person, but there are principles that should be treated with respect. When artists started their interest in democratic processes, it was in order to critique politicians' abusive conduct. If artists abuse democracy too, we end up losing the platform (the moral high ground), which is the only asset we have in this debate.

Appendix 4

Interview with Tone O Nielsen

Copenhagen, 14th October 2006

Re: *Minority Report*

BD - I want to talk first about context. How did you become involved in the project, What was your intention when you decided on involvement, and how did this relate to your previous work?

TON - Well, I started working as an independent curator in 1996 and left Denmark in 1997 for the US, because there was no forum for to discuss a critical, interesting, positive development of curatorial thinking, or rethinking of the medium of exhibition in Denmark. The discourse on curating through the 1990's, when the curator as phenomena was introduced in Denmark, was constantly discussed in terms of curators being parasites, feeding off artist's works. I found myself year after year trying to come up with a 'raison d'être' for being a curator, and I was stuck in thinking of the role of the curator as a moment of negotiation between artist and curator and wasn't able to find a forum here where I could rethink the medium of exhibition. So, I left and went to various curatorial programs in the US, dropped out of some of them and finished some others. I came back in 2002, having graduated from UCLA's critical and curatorial studies program with Mary Kelly. I returned not of my own free will but because my visa ran out. We had had a change of government in 2001 in Denmark and the five years I had been gone had drastically changed the political climate especially in relation to immigrants and refugees. Coming from heterogeneous, although segregated, Los Angeles and having worked for various community organizations looking at coloured and non-coloured communities, I was just appalled by the level of discourse. I felt that it was at a level where what you were allowed to say as an ethnic Dane about immigrants and refugees was on a sliding scale. I could pick up a Danish newspaper, take a marker-pen and cross out two thirds of an article and say that this would never have passed in a US paper; not even on Fox News.

BD – So, populist material from the press, was taking an anti political-correctness stance?

TON - Yes, and there was an essentialisation of the refugee and immigrant subject and of the ethnic Dane as well, describing them as two incompatible opposites. The Venstre, the pro market liberal party and of course the Danish People's Party had election posters and campaign brochures with representations of immigrants and refugees that were just unbelievable. So, I was very upset by this and around then I got an email from Trine Rytter Andersen asking if I would consider becoming part of a curatorial group and do something for the new Aarhus festival of art, and it was very vague in the beginning, she had also invited Anja Raithel, an independent curator from Aarhus and Kirsten Dufour a visual artist from Copenhagen, who I knew from before. We had our first meeting in November 2002 and it was very unclear if she wanted just Kirsten and me to curate, if we were in fact invited as

curators and whether Trine and Anja were part of the curatorial team. So at this preliminary meeting Trine said that she had contacted the city of Aarhus because she had heard rumours that they were going to start a recurring festival for contemporary art, she had contacted them and said I am your perfect project coordinator to get this started and maybe come up with some sort of a curatorial team. She had been talking with the steering committee who had proposed some sort of site specific sculpture thing along the Aarhus coastline. I was really quite arrogant, and I am sure she has said that as well, and said that I had absolutely no interest whatsoever in site-specific sculpture unless it has a political agenda, or a level of urgency to it, and if you are interested in this you should ask another curator because I am not the right person for it. I said at that meeting that the only thing I was interested in, and I would do it on my own or within this forum, was addressing this increase in racism in Denmark. I wanted to look at racism as a construction, try to explain how racism is taught, it is after all not inherited, and ask what the conditions were for it increasing. The rest of the group was very interested in this topic as well and it was decided, there and then that we would do a project on racism. Then we produced various proposals, the first with the working title *Something is Rotten in the State of Denmark*. From the very beginning we were sure that we wanted to work in an interdisciplinary fashion: not only with visual artists but also to engage community organizations, theorists, activists and so forth. This has been part of my curatorial practice for the past few years and I am primarily interested in strategies and not media. We kept working with this idea of the exhibition being a platform for information exchange and that the audiences would be a crucial element of this.

BD – You make a clear link in what you have just said and in the publicity for the project between the election of the centre right party to government and this growth in intolerance. How important was the timing of the project, could it have been carried out at a different time or was it specifically planned for a particular moment?

TON - I wasn't here in 2001 and you could argue that this road has been paved by the social democrats who were in power before for ten years. In fact Karen Jespersen, who writes an essay in the publication, is the former social minister and responsible for immigration under the social democrats, and she passed a lot of laws which are quite similar to some of the proposals that the Danish People's Party have come up with. In a classic case of social democrats moving to the right they did this in the lead up to the election, in order not to lose too many votes, and you ended up with a situation that in the centre right there was not really much difference between the parties, and what happens then is that the people move to the extremes at least to find some agenda or voice which they feel they can identify with. It happened here much as it had happened in Austria with the FPÜ.

BD - This election and the next were fought very much on the issue of immigration, was this as important as such a focus would suggest, or was it blown out of proportion as an issue?

TON – It is a very important question. I have stated in another project that the social democratic model that has been developed in Denmark from the 1930's till now is a model based on similarity, or 'sameness'. So, we can handle issues of equality in a Danish context but we can't handle difference. Denmark in the age of globalization is finding it simply impossible to use this model in dealing with processes of migration. There has been a process of confusion between equality and sameness. I argue that our integration model was essentially an assimilation model, and was all about levelling out, and you can see this happening all over Europe. As an immigrant, in order to become fully accepted you need to become more Danish than an ethnic Dane, the question is how do you define this 'Danishness' and then we are back to these processes of essentialism.

BD – In regards to this idea of their being a singular 'Danishness', has anyone researched when this supposed construct came into being?

TON – Pablo Lambias has an excellent essay where he deconstructs the idea of the welfare state from a Derridean perspective. What has happened with Danishness is that it has always been a nationalist construct, but that this nationalism has been strengthened by an imagined opposition: migration. The reason we eventually chose the title *Minority Report*, which references Philip K Dick's novel, is that in it he describes a state where you can condemn somebody who hasn't even committed a crime. I think that racism functions the same way and that immigrants are condemned before having been given a chance to explain the terms of their own subjectivity. The concept of the other in Denmark is very classical and as such very racist, because the other is understood as per se incompatible with the 'I'.

BD - Once you had agreed that this issue would be the central focus of the exhibition, how soon did the roles in the curatorial team cement themselves and how was the work division agreed upon?

TON - Because these roles were not made clear from the beginning we had a crisis in the team about half way through the planning of the project. We decided to let Trine join the curatorial group because she was unsure whether she was a curator or more a project coordinator. In the beginning we had this 50-50 conception of collaboration, and we were brainstorming everything together, the four of us running through every single aspect of the show, from concept to structure, methodology to the list of participants. So together we decided on the structure, which was divided into stations for displays and satellites for interventionist, performative and site-specific projects. This research period, which also saw us reach decisions on a final list of participants lasted from November 2002 until November 2003, so it took a year to develop this structure and come up with a huge list of participants 116 in total. It became very early on that we had different experiences, different skills and also different flaws. Trine was extremely good at dealing with the local politicians and I am way too aggressive and not diplomatic enough for this. So she primarily conducted all the negotiations with the city, because to

begin with I participated in a few of these meetings, I was so angry at the time that I managed to piss off everybody. Trine hadn't done a lot of curating and wasn't so confident with curatorial input on a structural or methodological level, but she was very good at networking, finding people and organising on an administrative level.

BD - Was it important for the project that she lived in Aarhus?

TON - Very important and that Anja did too. Anja and I had very similar interests, but in the beginning of the project very different curatorial methodologies. So one of the first confrontations we had was while deciding on the title. We replaced *Something is Rotten in the State of Denmark* with *Deconstructing Racism* and I wrote an exhibition proposal with this title strongly linking the increasing racism to recent developments in Danish politics. The steering committee freaked out and said that it was presented as a fact and not as a thesis, that they would not go along with this and that we had to question whether racism was really increasing to begin with. The first confrontation within the curatorial group came about then, when the steering group asked us whether it wasn't more constructive to focus on notions of tolerance and hospitality. Anja had been involved in an exhibition in Aarhus on the topic of hospitality and was open to this idea, but I said "no way we can't have another Christian, ideologically informed project, we have to look at this as a construction". But, I was interested in posing it as a thesis and eventually we introduced very carefully the idea that there are signs that either racism is increasing, or that racism is more clearly expressed nowadays.

BD - I note also that you are careful to point out that this 'racism' exists on both sides, both in terms of the immigrant population and the ethnic Danes.

TON - Yes because that is one of the flaws of the Left, to which I see myself belonging. There is a humanising tendency to regard an immigrant or refugee subject as of the Left, because they are in a position of suffering or under-privilege. We imagine that they must identify with other underprivileged subjects when in effect they don't. The majority of immigrants in Denmark are small-scale entrepreneurs and they traditionally vote to the Right. So of course we have to look not only at racism between majority and minority but also at racisms within minority groups and majority groups as well.

BD - In relation to the conflicts in the team you requested to be put in sole charge of curating the project. Why did you do this, and how was it received?

TON - Well we had got to a point during the first year where we were so divided on our approaches, that there was a lot of poor communication and negotiation of work which then didn't happen or happened in an unlucky or unprofessional way. After a year of looking at thousands of possible participants from inside and outside Denmark we were just exhausted, and despite the fact that that was the moment when we were supposed to produce the show the conception stage had worn us out completely. There was a lot of

doubling up on work, things not getting done and other things being done twice. At that time we had no office, and there was no Aarhus Festival of Art; we had to invent that along with the show. In essence there were two things to curate, and I felt that it was extremely important that we separate minority report from the festival, that the festival itself had its own structure, team and profile. I came up with a proposed solution that Trine became responsible for the coordination of the festival, along with the steering committee, and that I became the head-curator of *Minority Report*. This made things much easier; we divided work and met less frequently. If someone had a question regarding shipping or whatever that could be cleared with the responsible person. We could have one on one discussions instead of having all tiny details being discussed by the group; things went much more smoothly.

BD - Once these divisions had been made between festival and exhibition, were there any further cases when content of the exhibition was affected, censored or influenced by the festival steering committee?

TON - No, after we had reworked the proposal entitled *Deconstructing Racism*, softened it and opened it up as a question, there were no restrictions. There were however constant concerns about the budget, and it is the most expensive project I have done so far, with a total budget of 550,000 Euro, a lot of which was sponsorship. This was another area where we were in disagreement because Trine was not so interested in the political connotations of certain kinds of money and was interested in any kind of funds that she could raise, where I wanted to think more about the ethics of which funds we accepted. This was perhaps related to the inclusive model we favoured, saying it is not an anti-racist show but one which wants to bring both sides to engage in a dialogue to test each others preconceptions, but in a different way to what the mass media and the political forum have to offer.

BD - I want to move on to the form of the exhibition. I understand that the exhibition was not conceived as solely a site for display, although exhibition spaces were part of the project, but also embraced other forms and formats. What was your intention behind this variety?

TON - There were several ideas behind this desire to work in an interdisciplinary manner, first of all because a range of forms allowed us to bring practitioners from various fields together and have their processes of analysis tested.

BD So the spaces and formats you selected were geared towards different kinds of representation?

TON - Yes, with this we were able to create a kaleidoscopic encirclement of the construct of racism. So, we had this idea that visual art could provide certain kinds of analysis, while text, discussions and activist strategies could do this in other quite different ways. So given all these different practitioners and their different approaches to media we were in need of many different kinds of space. So, the Equestrian Hall became the information centre and

the central nervous system of the exhibition where all the discursive events took place, Aarhus Art Building was for artwork that required a white-cube situation, the East of Eden movie theatre screened our film program, and of course we had to create a space for the textual level, so we produced the book. Circling these four 'stations' were the satellite projects, intervening into white and immigrant ghettos throughout Aarhus. With this inter-disciplinary approach and with the stations and satellites we were hoping to address as many different kinds of audience as possible and create a situation where you could either actively seek the exhibition or you could stumble into it accidentally.

BD - Before we move on to ask if the public reaction matched your hopes, there is another formal aspect of the exhibition which interests me, that of marketing. What marketing strategy did you decide upon for the exhibition and was it seen as another 'station' or considered supplementary?

TON - Well PR and marketing was a really big problem for the show, and it is still an area that I am not very good at. What we did to publicise the show was quite conventional and we put far too little money aside for PR. We presumed that the topic itself was so confrontational and daring that it would provoke reaction without the need for publicity. With the experience we have now I would say that we should have hired a professional PR person, not necessary a commercial agency but someone who knows what works and what doesn't. I am still looking for such a person who works in an ethical manner that corresponds to my politics, but I am sure that there is such a person. I think we should have set aside at least one fifth of the budget in order to publicise it properly and we didn't do this. We did however produce 6000 copies of the free publication and a further 6000 of the events folder that included details of all the events and was distributed all over Aarhus. We placed ads in all the big Danish daily papers, sent regular email reminders, press releases and handed out Xeroxed flyers on the streets on the days of the events. We also produced banners, which marked the venues clearly. We thought that this was enough, but it wasn't.

BD - When you say this wasn't enough are you basing this on visitor figures?

TON - Well, we had around 200 visitors a day and I think this was too low. There was an amazing scenario, that Aarhus Art Museum had just opened their new giant building when we were half way through the exhibition. They opened with a large retrospective of Olafur Eliasson and the building was right next to the equestrian hall. We just watched as lines and lines of people went into the museum to see the show, and none of them stopped by Station 1. Olafur was actually very generous, because people can relate to the work of Olafur in a different way to the kinds of work that we exhibited and he got a lot of press, he used part of this press coverage to draw attention to our project, explaining that there was a really important show going on and mentioning *Minority Report* as the best exhibition of 2004. Of course publicity is only part of the reason, because by nature it was a very challenging show, you were asked to attend again and again, and it was

simply huge.

BD - Given that the mass media needs to simplify things in order to communicate them, do you think that they found this size and complexity difficult to handle? In relation to this question do you think it possible to mediate this kind of project successfully?

TON - Well, I would have to say yes to both questions, because I appreciate their difficulty but these are not new curatorial approaches. There have been many of these kinds of shows over the last ten years and there are many curators working in this way, there really should by now be a way for the media to deal with these inter-disciplinary projects coming from art. We see inter-disciplinary activities in big conferences and other kinds of festivals and these do get coverage.

BD - So then, to the question of how the exhibition was received.

TON - On a general level I think the project was successful in that it managed to attract minority groups, and the debates we had were very well attended by both white and coloured communities. These groups were very grateful to be able to have a forum where they could address politicians from the Danish People's Party, and talk with extreme left-wing anti-racists and so on. What happened during this process, because it was a national and international project, was that you had community workers from Aarhus, who themselves had immigrant backgrounds, meeting with similar representatives from Copenhagen who they had previously not known about. There is a constant complaining in Denmark that refugees and immigrants are not active on a political level, that they are not working to better their rights and that they are not educated enough to tackle the dilemma of as they put it 'democracy vs. Islam'. I think our show proved that this is wrong, there are a lot of really hard-working people who are mobilising and organising. On this level the show managed to produce new networks and I am very proud of that.

BD - I am interested in the timescale of the project. The show had a very long research phase, but was eventually only 'open' for a month. Do you think the project would have benefited had the display and events stage been longer?

TON - We decide on four weeks partially because of a logistical issue, in particular finding and using these various spaces simultaneously for four weeks. But we were also interested in having an intense and in your face quality to the timing of the event, really like a festival, getting drunk for five weeks in Bayern in Munich and that's it. Buy one ticket and you can see all this artwork, view all these films, hear all this music, enjoy this stand up comedy, hang out and discuss for a month. Take some time out of your diary and dig into this!.

BD - Did people do that?

TON - There were a handful who kept returning, and that's another thing I

am proud of. But, in the end they did not justify the fact that there were simply too few visitors for a project of this scale, with this kind of budget and, most importantly, with such an urgent message.

BD - I like the idea that the networks that were born during the discussions might represent a kind of after-life for the project. Have you done anything to sustain this in the years since the exhibition took place?

TON - There were several ideas about how to continue and we discussed with some of the participants the idea of a possible follow-up conference organised by these minority groups themselves, to show that they are organised, linked-up and able to manage big events. But this never really became formalised although we know that several of these groups have stayed in touch and others have gone on to collaborate on things together.

BD - Is it really necessary to formalise these connections?

TON - Yes, I think they have to be formalised, and the documentation of such events and meetings should be formalised as well. Increasingly I am working with the idea that comprehensive documentation of a project is not something that comes afterwards, but it should be understood as within the project or at least the last stage of it.

BD - While on the topic of documentation lets talk about Station 4. For me looking at it this is a fairly academic publication with essays from politicians, theorists, writers and poets that certainly requires pre-knowledge and an awareness of the issues surrounding the project. Who is this book for?

TON - Well i have to disagree with you, because I think the contributions to Station 4 are on very different levels. There is a very short essay by a psychiatrist, which simply recollects his meeting with a refugee, then there is the piece of political propaganda by Karen Jespersen, and then there are these image montages which take you slowly through the tightening of the immigration laws. There is academic material like the essay from Paul Gilroy and of course Chantal Mouffe, who is an academic but writes in a very accessible way. So it was intended again to have this kaleidoscopic effect where you have all these different people talking about various aspects of racism and how it operates in Denmark.

BD - How many copies of Station 4 were printed, and how many were sold during the exhibition?

TON - I think 2000 were printed and we sold quite a few, I can't remember how many, but I was quite happy with how many we sold. But, although the show was reviewed there was no mention of Station 4 in any of these, and it wasn't reviewed as a publication in itself either, and I think it functions that way. So we were naive in terms of marketing and also in terms of distribution and publicity about the publication. By the end of the project we simply didn't have any more energy, we wore each other out and the project was extremely

demanding for us as well. For the last month of the project I was living in Aarhus, going to bed at 2 a.m. and getting up at 5, with a new event every day, new participants arriving and so forth. I am used to this, and I am not complaining but it was a very intense and tiring time.

BD - What was the Media response to the project?

TON - Well the media response can be divided into two camps, the local and the national. The local media did a good job advertising and listing the events etc. They reported quite a lot at one moment when there was vandalism of one of the satellite projects, and also took an interest in the poster project by Martin Krenn and Oliver Ressler which made a direct link between capitalism and the hierarchies of racism, sexism and intolerance. This project was highly debated and eventually banned, because they used the European Union logo, although we got around this by crossing out one star with black tape. There was the usual debate about whether tax-payer's money should be spent on a project like this, and there was one local art critic who was appalled that the show wasn't tough enough. He freaked out about the fact that we were four women and said that we were self-absorbed, self-fulfilling and that we were wrong to have no right wing artists in the show. We had a public discussion with him in the papers pointing out that our consultant group consisted mainly of men of an ethnic background and a broad political persuasion. On a national level I think we only got three reviews in the big papers, and they were good reviews, but really art reviews. One journalist came down from Stockholm, was fascinated by the show and wrote a very good piece and that was it.

BD - Would you have liked to see broader coverage?

TON - Absolutely, but the lack of coverage was not only due to poor marketing. I believe that Minority Report suffered from the fact that it was in Aarhus, which is considered a provincial city, except of course by people who live in Aarhus. Not many people made the effort to get on a train from Copenhagen and it became a show which was talked about but which not many people saw, due to the location. Likewise you can take the reception of the show two ways: on the one hand perhaps poor marketing and bad curating, 'an uninteresting show' or on the other you can analyze it in political terms and say that the 'silencing' of the show is part of a denial to really confront this as a construction. Maybe the show was seen as just another left wing revolt against a right wing political climate, maybe it became just part of the Realpolitik, not functioning politically, but becoming absorbed by the political debate. This was a pity, because I don't think it was a politically correct show in any way, or that it fed into the mainstream political discussion. With our inclusive model, which I am hugely proud of, and with our consultant group we really tried to stage the debates in a non-conventional manner. Not the extreme left confronting the extreme right, but rather seeing if it was possible in one debate to find somebody who was even more racist than the representative from the Danish People's Party, so that they can confront on a different level, beyond a confirmation of the status quo

or of the common polarisations of these debates. What came out during these debates and this was very important, was the complete failure of the anti-racist movement to talk about this in a way that doesn't slide back into a '68 discourse, which the right has already appropriated and deconstructed. This, for me was one of the very sad moments, but also a very productive one because it made clear that the left has invented no new tools, no strategies and no discourse to re-appropriate this territory, which has been taken away from them. Democracy is a right wing concept now.

BD - it is as if there is a vacuum waiting for a new critical initiative.

TON - Yes and this vacuum, which became so clear after the exhibition, is why I have gone on to do a historical show. You could say that my current project with Frederikke Hansen is a prologue to *Minority Report*, that then becomes the epilogue. It is not enough to look at intolerance today, but you have to figure out structurally where it comes from.

Appendix 5

Interview with Trine Rytter Andersen

Aarhus, 13th October 2006

Re: *Minority Report*

Barnaby Drabble: I am interested in the context for the project, how did it come about?

Trine Rytter Andersen: I heard that the Municipality had made a decision that they wanted a festival of art and that they wanted to spend 1.2 million crowns as a starting point for doing this. So, using my network I went to Helen Lykke-Møller, who was at that time a central figure close to both the politicians and the municipality and I asked her "If this decision has been taken two years ago, what is happening, who is going to do this?". The answer was "we don't know", Helen said "we cant do it with our institution" and the Kulturhus Aarhus said "we cant do it either". So I said "why don't you let me try to find out what it is that the politicians want from this festival?"

BD: So the existence of these funds for a festival initially provoked your interest, how did you proceed?

TRA: I always see every framework as a challenge, so I wanted to find out exactly what kind of framework this was, whether I could gain access to it and widen it. I went to the town hall and spoke with the politicians and then invited different people from the art world in Aarhus and had a discussion on what their expectations were and what this festival could be? I found out there were two different goals here. One was to put Aarhus on the international cultural map, and the other was more locally driven. The politicians had a modernist idea where all the artists in the city would get dressed up and gather to build a kind of Monmartre village, where the people of the city would come together to watch the artists work and learn sketching, painting and drawing. The others saw art and culture as important primarily as a form of marketing and wanted to do something on an international scale. I tried to explain to both parties why these two interests could not meet and that nobody from outside would ever look at Aarhus if the local artists were dressing up as Monmartre artists to entertain the local inhabitants. So after having this discussion and telling them about contemporary art, I proposed that, as this was a festival without a venue, we needed the support of the local people and it should be a festival of art in the public space.

BD: You co-curated the exhibition with three others how did this collaboration occur and what influence did the others have on the initial concept?

TRA: I set about putting together a curatorial team as I did not want to work alone on this. Tone had just returned to Denmark and I had been reading her articles. I thought it would be interesting to bring her school of thought and mindset to Denmark.

When the curatorial group met we asked ourselves "what is the subject here? and we were all clear, "This is going to be about colonialism and racism in the Danish political context absolutely no discussion." We were interested in how the multicultural society was developing, how we could discuss this with an exhibition and how we could engage inhabitants in the discussion in an open way. This seemed important because we saw how polarization of society at the time kept people within their own little groups, none of whom were able to share or discuss with anyone else.

We made a concept that described the whole thing from A to Z. We had to give this to the politicians and they had to accept it. I had various meetings with them defending the concept because they were very insecure about the whole subject matter. They felt that it was very delicate and they were afraid how it would be received. I had to mediate between them, the curatorial team and the steering group.

BD: After the initial concept had been accepted how did work in the group progress?

TRA: The project was developed slowly but with Tone's method it was quite easy. We had a long research period where we were all reading a lot of texts and books and for a whole year we had meetings and discussions with artists, and with all sorts of groups here in Aarhus, immigrant groups, cultural, political and social groups. We believed that if we wanted to genuinely engage them in the festival they had to know us. So it was a whole year of running around mixing and mingling with different people. The politicians did not understand why this was so important. They were always looking at the project with the traditional idea of how to make an art exhibition.

BD: You commissioned a number of new works for the project. How did you progress in discussions with them?

TRA: In relation to the artists we saw ourselves as partners, someone who they could exchange ideas with, and carrying all of this theoretical knowledge through the research we had done we were very much an eye to eye level partner, we could help them out with the local context and feeding them information. We gave the artists enormous freedom in what they wanted to do, but we also gave them support by answering their questions or helping them find answers by organising meetings with people. Everyone was given the whole concept for the festival and things remained open to a point but when we came to curating their input we were very precise about what we wanted from people saying " we want you to be part of this because..." or "we would like you to be part of this discussion on this topic". Of course people came back and argued for other roles, but this was all negotiated with the framework as a whole in mind.

BD: Although you talk about the curatorial team Tone seemed to play a leading role, was this the case?

TRA: Yes, and at a particular point Tone became the leader of the curatorial team. That was because she as a person could not accept anyone else. That's just the way she is. She was the one who, on a deeper level, felt she was the most knowledgeable and so she had to steer. But this was only because of her temperament; she needed to be the one who in the end could say yes or no. She is a very controlling person who is also so smart and generous, so in order to make her secure and avoiding the possibility that she would leave the project whenever we encountered a problem we had to give her the leadership of the curatorial team. At that point I became primarily the practical organiser, although still nominally a member of the curatorial team.

I think there is a difference between how artists and academics work. Academics like Tone seem to keep everything in their brain while artists like Kirsten and I are more practical, and these two methods are very difficult to compare sometimes. Kirsten and I were capable of working with chaos while Tone always has her laptop in front of her keeping track of everything. Anja is also an academic and she was also more controlling within the team. Up to a point these different approaches led to conflict.

BD: I gather that one such conflict concerned the relationship to the exhibitions Sponsors.

TRA: Yes, In the curatorial group we had a fight about this. I made a booklet to send to firms which I had a local communication company work on. It was very smart and slick, but also provocative and it was a response to spending a lot of time on the Internet, researching the values of the companies and trying to connect to these. I sent the booklet with a letter and followed this with a phone call and often this resulted in a disagreement. I used these to try and enter a dialogue with the CEOs and frequently I was invited to have a discussion with them. With some companies like Ikea there were no problems, they employ a lot of foreigners and they are very outspoken about their wish to assist integration in Denmark and all over the world. In other cases it was more difficult. We have a local slaughterhouse called Danish Crown, which employs a lot of foreign workers, and I thought they might be suitable as a main sponsor. I contacted them and had two meetings, but at the ethical level of the discussions it became clear that they employed immigrants because they were cheap and that did nothing to help their foreign workers self organise.

I wanted the sponsors to participate in Minority Report, I wanted them to make statements, I wanted them to show themselves in the equestrian hall, I wanted them to participate in the debates, and to say how they saw their responsibilities as employers. This took place, but not as fully as I hoped because the companies were so afraid and suspicious.

BD: The project took several forms, which you named stations, including an exhibition, works in the public space, a live program and a book. When did you decide on this variety of forms and why?

TRA: We chose to imagine an exhibition that would take a variety of forms right from the beginning when we co-wrote the concept. All of us had experienced exhibitions that land out of nowhere like a UFO, stay for the duration of the exhibition and then take off and disappear again. We also wanted to land the project, but ask the public not only to be an art audience but also to be present as political subjects, inhabitants and human beings; with the aim that the festival would live longer in the mind, and perhaps spark new things.

During the exhibition, some people found this dual role incredibly easy changing between these different aspects of approach to the exhibition. Mostly the younger generation seemed easy with this, they could look at the exhibition and then attend a political debate, feeling free to speak up and participate, and willing to listen to other people. However many middle aged people found the experience inaccessible and unacceptable. This idea did not fit with their concept of art, they did not want art to be political, they wanted it to be autonomous. They felt that we were too outspokenly left-wing and there were several who questioned why we had no radical right-wing art presented in the exhibition. So their alienation was not so specifically related to the form but to the representation question.

Many of the young people who came were attending the university of higher education institutions and they felt that the subject interested them, that they and their children would have to live in a multicultural context and that they wanted to discuss it.

BD: What can be seen as the afterlife of the project?

TRA: I think the project has inspired people in the art field here in Aarhus. It was important that we invited students of the academy here on an equal level with the other artists, and that they in turn helped the international artists and got to know one another. A further benefit of our working method was that all the artists involved could get further into and discuss the whole concept of the exhibition in depth. The exhibition was part of a change that meant that this way of thinking and working, and this aim of exploring different forms, have become much more visible in the activities of Aarhus based artists. In fact in general *Minority Report* is frequently referred to in so many contexts; the political and social as well as the artistic.

There is an interesting situation where, by chance, Aarhus staged this exhibition *Images of the Middle East*, right during the Mohammed cartoons crisis. The Municipality asked Helen Lykke-Møller to do the project and I was able to help by giving her all the research material that I had from *Minority Report*. It was clear that we had made the connections to all the local groups and she could go with my name in her hand and immediately get talking to the people. So, I think the best thing is that the network is established; we know that they are there, and they know that we are here and we use each

other.

BD: You mention the artists and the communities, what has the impact of the project been on the local political context?

TRA: When we were presenting the project I was lucky that politicians hardly ever really read anything to the end. When we were actually presenting the project across the road from the town hall I had this vision that the local centre right and liberal politicians would join us to discuss with the other national political figures we had gathered. I hoped that they might get inspired and meet with the people from the west of the city. But they didn't, they stayed away as if they were silently hostile to the project, keeping a very low profile. While the local social democrat politicians of immigrant background were very supportive, even in the media.

BD: What kind of publics or public were you aiming to involve with the project? And what form of engagement did you hope to produce?

TRA: We worked with the idea of public on two levels. The first level was to address people who were interested in art, and that is part of the reason for organising an historical station in the Aarhus Art Building, so that you could observe the whole span of discussion of this subject matter in an art historical way. The rest of the group we were addressing was everyone who is interested in politics and who cares about how society is developing. This could be anybody and hopefully everybody.

We were aiming at making people more reflective and less automatic in their response, asking them to think more and to try to see things from different angles. I believe we staged this very clearly and as such we were very direct and very open. The book represents a particular way of doing this, although it is perhaps idealistic to expect people to go home from the exhibition and read the book, but it stood in for our wishes. We all felt that the way people discuss politics today has to be on a more informed level.

BD: What was the press reaction?

TRA: We were pumping out press releases over the thirty days and we had 166 features, articles, interviews and front pages in the media during that time. The coverage was nationwide and international with one of the biggest critics from Stockholm coming to review the show. However, the Jyllands Posten, who went on to publish the Mohammed cartoons were just putting us down from the very day we opened, they were writing us out of history and even at one point carried out a character assassination on me.

BD: How did you select the artists, theorists and community groups you wanted to work with?

TRA: We researched such a stack of people and discussed back and forth, putting them together in relation to what we had in mind - we wanted a

historical view, we wanted an international view, we wanted a gender balance, we wanted a balance of political views. We sat for such a long time holding the artists up against one another, considering which work we were interested in and asking which work spoke to which other, and how the groups and talks would work together. It was like making a bouquet of flowers, adding and subtracting until we had something that was structured, balanced and organised. From the beginning we had the idea of the stations and the satellites fixed and often it was a case of fitting the artists into these blocks and the dynamics they represented. This was not really a theme exhibition as there were several themes represented in the art that we showed; issues of identity, ethnicity, racism, language, gender and migration to name a few.

BD: the project eventually involved well over 100 participating artists, groups, performers and speakers, an ambitious number given the budget, why did you feel the need for this large scale and what effect did the scale have on the visitors?

TRA: The scale was important as we wanted to prove that this was not just some funny idea that we curators had dreamt up, illustrated by picking ten people and making a little exhibition. We wanted to say that this is a large topic that extends to all groups in society.

However, for the public it was way too heavy. With the average art viewer spending so little time in front of each work, here we wanted people to come again on another day, to see an exhibition on one day, come back for a talk or a film screening on another and go to a concert in the evening. We asked people for a great involvement, which most found very difficult.

BD: what did you learn from the project?

TRA: If I did it again I would have the project run for three months and focus more on the education element and the projects with school groups. We found out that the schools needed much more time to plan visits than we expected. I would also ask myself the question of how much I can actually ask of a viewer, particularly how much time.

I think that if we had this festival every year over say four years the audience would know what to expect. We designed a festival, not just an exhibition and this took people by surprise, it was the first time, and a new idea.

BD: A second Aarhus festival of contemporary art never emerged, why?

TRA: There was an international competition for the second Aarhus festival of contemporary art right after *Minority Report*. Anja and I participated and made a new concept, but we were not invited to the second round of interviews. In the end Aarhus municipality ran into debt and the project was put on the shelf. This was a shame as we had so many people responding to the first festival, wanting to communicate and cooperate with us on the future

of the project. I am very critical of this side of the art world, that so many projects simply pop up and then die out, because you are a project employee and there is therefore no possibility of ongoing continuity. You lose so much in this way, so much experience and in some ways the moment that you create is lost also, which I find very sad.

Appendix 6

Interview with Helen Lykke-Møller

Aarhus, 13th October 2006

Re: Minority Report

At the time of the exhibition Lykke-Møller was director of the Aarhus Art Exhibition Centre & chair of the steering group for the Aarhus festival of contemporary art.

Barnaby Drabble : how did the steering group for the festival come together?

Helen Lykke-Møller: It was the community that organised it, after a social democratic politician suggested the festival and organised a million Danish Crowns towards this. This was 2000, and everyone began to ask, how do we do this? Is one million crowns enough? And so on. In 2002 a few of us had a brainstorming meeting to discuss what we wanted and there was an idea of a sculpture festival using the coastline from the harbour to the museum south of the town. In 2002 we put together the steering group, with one person from the art museum, one from the business context, one from the artist's organisation, one regional councillor, Pia Buchardt from Kuturhus Aarhus and me from the Art exhibition centre. So we were six people. Trine was around doing research for me on Ernesto Neto, who we made a very successful show with that year, and as she showed an interest we decided to give her a half year salary to do some research into the festival idea. She had come to the first brainstorming so she knew about the project. She went away and then it turned around to be *Something Rotten in the State of Denmark*, which was something very different to what we had expected. We found it very interesting but we were a bit nervous about what the politicians would say. During the whole process we had many meetings with the cultural politicians to be sure that people agreed to the project going ahead. Trine had to work hard with the curatorial group to stop them going too far into an area where the public would simply feel it was too much, but the concept they came with to us was very clear and although we had to change the title and a few small things like that, their initial intentions were followed.

BD: What was your perception of the curatorial group Trine pulled together.

HLM: Well, we could feel their enthusiasm, Trine and the others had done similarly political things before and we knew about their projects. We recognised that things were changing, that art was not just painting and sculpture anymore and of course you want to be part of this change and say yes. I mostly saw Tone, Anja and Kirsten as the curators and Trine more as a mediator between us and them, I saw her as responsible for the organisation, fundraising and sponsoring which I knew she could do because she is a very brainy girl. We offered some bookkeeping and administrative help from the house here and in hindsight this is something we could have supported her more with, as they kept to their budget but this was something they had a lot of trouble with and which added to their workload.

BD: I presume the steering committee had to negotiate with the politicians in support the project, what form did these negotiations take?

HLM: Yes, I participated in many of the meetings with the cultural committee and we discussed the project until Trine felt comfortable with the conditions. It was not difficult to negotiate the project, but we really wanted them to understand what the project was. It is difficult to get ideas like this into politicians' heads, you don't want to cause them to be unnecessarily nervous, but you want them to understand what it is about and that's a fine line to walk. In the end I think we managed ok, they agreed to the project and we had no complaints afterwards. Although its common that the local politicians show little interest in cultural happenings like this.

BD: Given the current state of the debate on immigration and race in Denmark, heated up by the Mohammed cartoons and the behaviour of the youth wing of the people's party, do you feel that *Minority Report* was ahead of its time in pointing to the importance of openly discussing this these issues?

HLM: Just a month ago we made the exhibition *Images of the Middle East*, together with institutions in Copenhagen. I made a series of literature evenings in the west town and it was clear that this is really the time to do this. It might have been interesting to have held *Minority Report* now, because I feel there would have been more discussion about the project today.

BD: Do you feel it was too little discussed?

HLM: Yes, because although there were some really good articles from national papers there was not such a great debate in the local press, and some of the press was unnecessarily negative, probably because they didn't understand the project. There was a feeling of being a little depressed at the end of the project, we did it but then nobody wanted to continue fighting. It took maybe six months before our spirits lifted and that was a shame. There were misunderstandings with Trine at that time. We felt that there had been a lot of evaluation be she wanted a deeper and more specific evaluation and we felt we had neither the money nor capacity, and there was no wish from the political side.

BD: What were the successes and failures of the project?

HLM: I think the project was too elitist and too academic, and we talked about this frequently in the steering group, but had to accept it; you can't tell people "don't be too academic". A lot of people were excluded by this, people who did not attend university or deal with these things daily found it too heavy, they were bored even. I don't think that the normal foreigner, say someone from Iran or Iraq felt that it was something for them either, for example at the opening in the Art Building we had a café with water-pipes and cakes etc. but the concept didn't work, you didn't see it being used by the

inhabitants of the west part of town. Instead it was the underground art scene of Aarhus, but few foreigners other than the group that had agreed to participate and a few people around them. I can see the difference now, having just made these literature evenings in a new meeting point in the west city. There we had about 300 people from the west city and maybe 50 from over here. I think this is a lot about who you are dealing with in these groups, I got lucky meeting this Palestinian guy who is really respected and strong in the community. When he says to people that they should come to something because it will be interesting at least 100 people will come. We simply didn't have the experience of who to talk to during *Minority Report*, it takes such a long time. For this last project I think I had ten meetings with the writers and poets, and they have to really believe in you and trust in you before you can go a step further.

Minority Report certainly laid the ground for contact to some of the groups though, particularly the women's groups. But I think the project had too little input from the men, you didn't see so many of them, and to be honest that's very important in their society. Of course we are all interested in doing something for the women from the Middle East, but you cant do so much for them if you don't go through their men, at least that is what I have learned. But *Minority Report* was a great experience, and some of the artists involved certainly benefited from being involved and had success with their work. There were also some very well visited speeches and talks, where some good stuff was said.

Appendix 7

Interview with Ursula Biemann

Geneva, 24th February 2007

Re: *The Maghreb Connection*

Barnaby Drabble: Given that your practice can be defined as both artistic and curatorial I am interested in how you perceive your exhibition practice. To understand this better I ask how this project relates to your previous projects, in particular *Geography and the Politics of Mobility* (Generali Foundation, 2003)?

Ursula Biemann: Over the years, I have tested and experimented with various forms of collaboration, and as soon as this collaboration is established it turns into some kind of curatorial project. *The Maghreb Connection* could relate as far back as *Kültür*, where I first worked with a number of people and the work came together as an exhibition, but the result was not a curated art project in the traditional sense. At the Generali Foundation, with the very corporate institution that it is, I thought that it would be interesting to invite some other already existent artistic positions, to question or maybe compliment what I am doing. Within that project I initiated *Frontera Sur* with five other people, which was a looser, more chaotic and spontaneous collaboration with artists and activists. *Frontera Sur* offered a less designed, firm and constructed aspect, whereas the *Geography* exhibition at the Generali Foundation really needed that definition.

BD: What is *Frontera Sur*?

UB: Well, in the end the *Geography* exhibition turned out to be a gathering of five different forms of collaboration, in relation to groups that I invited. *Frontera Sur* arose when I went on location in the Gibraltar region with two other women video makers and an anthropologist, Angela Sanders. We started to do fieldwork ourselves, and also started to encounter people who were doing activist/media type of work and we became a group of five pieces, that related to one another and developed over the course of a year. This was similar to the way *The Maghreb Connection* developed, you keep in contact, you look at each other's work, you constantly hear what areas the others are covering, so that you have less of a responsibility to cover everything in your piece. You exchange theoretical interests and exchange data saying 'hey - have you read this?' You work naturally but not in this tight sort of way where you meet regularly across a table and make common decisions, so it's not at all that kind of collaboration. I think this relates very much to some of the things I have done before.

BD: You talk about the balance of contents, based on the themes and interests which you were variously working on, and the wish to avoid overlaps and conflicts. In the case of the *The Maghreb Connection*, how important in this collaborative process was it that this was moving towards a point of formalisation in an exhibition?

UB: Well, I was approached by Pro Helvetia to do an exhibition in Cairo, but I was not interested in doing anything on Egypt, so I decide quite early to look at a whole region and do a trans-national reflection of what is going on. It was always clear that the first exhibition would take place in Cairo, and we negotiated with William (Wells) to have it there, because it's (the Townhouse Gallery) virtually the only place which can reach out to the kind of people we were interested in. It was obvious too that we would like to show it in Switzerland, because it's a Pro Helvetia project. I had been talking with Katya (Garcia Anton) for a while about doing something and she jumped on it and said 'oh yeah, lets do that'. We had a good connection right away and this was one of the better places I could think of in Switzerland. Also Geneva is a really interesting place in terms of the organisations that work here, and because some of the people involved in the project are actually from the context of the Esba (l'École supérieure des beaux-arts, Geneva) and the project was eventually based there in part as a research project. So there are many reasons why this partnership with the Centre D'Art Contemporain was good.

BD: the question was maybe less specifically about where the exhibitions took place, as at which point this formalisation as 'exhibition' took place. Was the research undertaken looking towards a point where all of these videos, images and works would be shown together?

UB: I was content oriented in bringing the group together. This one covered this and this one more that, this one I knew had a more artistic/poetic approach while this one had a more political/essayistic approach to the concerns of migration. So I knew that there were not so many players in this project and that each had to take their place. I saw this clearly from the outset; from the beginning to the end I am the curator of this project.

BD: How important was the book or catalogue? If you curated from 'the beginning to the end' did you edit this way too?

UB: Many of the decisions for the book were taken together with Charles Heller, as he brought in many things. He is constantly reading theory and he supplied me throughout with large amounts of text, which I should have been reading too (laughs). He often wrote little synopses of these to me rather than just overloading my email, and it was very pleasant to have this filtering because he has the kind of intellect that can do this more easily than mine. I would say that the book was a bit of a mess for a long time, because there were so many articles of interest, but it did come together as he worked his way through. His essay is an interesting result of this work; you can see how the artist makes an effort to make sense of the world through reading all these things. But the publication was related to the decisions made for the conference. Most of the speakers were selected because they would function well for the conference and as a secondary measure these texts found their way into the book. The conference was a full day, eight hours, and took place in Cairo after the exhibition opening. It was interesting because in Cairo's art context there has never been a conference of that kind of calibre, it was new

that such a discussion could take place in relation to art, and it attracted a lot of people who came not only from the art world but also political and NGO settings, resulting in an interesting mix and some very smart questions about art.

BD: so what came first the conference, the work or the texts?

UB: Well, it takes four months to make a book like that and so we had to make decisions about who is saying what and the texts had to be delivered. We artists had to interrupt our production and write a text in August when you had no clue what the piece was going to be, but pretend you knew exactly how it was going to turn out (laughs). Add to this that some of the artists had never really written before, and I had to be tough and make them all write, because I think it is important for them to articulate the research.

BD: You use the term 'an art and research project' to describe *The Maghreb Connection*, and the participants include alongside artists, a geographer, a sociologist and an anthropologist. You have just mentioned that you see writing as an important 'articulation' of research, which makes me interested to see how you think art can function as research?

UB: Well, you need to do research to understand where discourse and representation is about your subject matter at that particular time, in order to define a field of intervention. Otherwise you don't know where to start with a practice when you are unfamiliar with this whole landscape. I wanted clearly to pursue a geographic approach, which doesn't mean that there is no social factor in all of this or no question of human rights, but that we were particularly interested in understanding this trans-cultural tissue, that is being created through a number of dynamics, which we risk ignoring if we focus in on just the migrants themselves.

BD: In such a project, does research come before the works, or do the works embody periods of research?

UB: Well, Charles and I needed to do quite a bit of preliminary research in order to formulate a concept. So, there were already a number of pages there and that needed quite a bit of reading. This concept was used to communicate with all the artists, participants and partners. We had just one concept for everybody, which started to inform the whole thing. As we went along we redefined it and people started to add pictures and their own material, forming an organic thing that grew and grew until it became rather final in its form. This helped us define where we needed to go on the field trips, and where the groups were that we wanted to investigate.

BD: This concept, did it take the form of an electronic document, which was passed between you?

UB: Yes, we used a PDF document, a very practical thing that helped us understand the whole. There were also other connections between the people.

For example, I went to see Hala (Elkoussy) in Amsterdam and the two artists from Maastricht (Raphael Cuomo & Maria Iorio) came to visit and suddenly the four of us were there together.

BD: What you describe in the book is the 'opening up of a field among theoretical, aesthetic and activist concerns'. I am interested in the activist question; in what way did the project illustrate or adopt activist strategies?

UB: Well, for example, Observatorio Tecnologico are a group who do 'radical' and 'militant' research, these are terms they use, meaning that they want to have a direct impact on the material world I suppose. They come from journalism and in additions to the maps, which they have provided for the exhibition, they have organised radio projects across the straits, streaming projects and border camps. They adopt the language of anti-globalisation and direct action, with very performative means.

BD: In addition to the activist content i am interested in the way the exhibition itself can play a role in 'opening up a field' as you describe. Given the other formats available were their challenges in formulating this material as exhibition?

UB: It never occurred to me that the exhibition format might be a problem, because this is incidentally the way I work and have worked for many years. I can't think of with which other means besides photography, mapping and video, which you find in the exhibition, you might do the job of signifying in this domain of movement and space. The Townhouse gallery in Cairo looks very different to the Centre, there is a factory type space and next to it a shop, which does not look like a square normal room at all, and then an old villa that is the Townhouse, which has a parquet wooden floor. So you have very different qualities of space, and we could say easily here is space for two photographers and here is perfect for a video installation. So it was scattered on the one hand but also very integrated in the neighbourhood. Whereas I was much more worried about this space (Geneva) because its much more open, and sterile, despite the industrial floor. I was worried because it was produced for a very messy atmosphere, and you know Cairo is really quite a messy and chaotic place (laughs).

BD: Given your interest in the connections between works, and your respect for mess, why did you choose to adopt a fairly traditional approach and separate the works into small rooms using partitions in the space here in Geneva?

UB: Well this is the way the space has been built and I would have had to make decisions about knocking down walls, which they have been using for years or make huge interventions like building a cabin for the projections. Actually I didn't mind the fact that the space is open to the sides, the works keep relating quite obviously to one another because they are all shown more tightly together here, and this creates a conceptual link. We have one space where the visitors can grasp much more easily what the issues are, where in

Cairo this was really separated and despite going from one space to another it did not always all come together in their mind. As an artist I am used to one particular work being shown in five, six, seven different forms of installation. So I get much less worked up about one particular space, because I know its not the last or a unique time that this will be shown. So I try something and say 'this looks ok'. I think the works on show are very multi-layered so I didn't think I needed to add any in-between comments by intervening in the overall picture as a curator. We were thinking of maybe using some quotes, but its already plenty so I thought lets leave it fairly simple, don't overdo it in terms of curatorial statement and let the people really get into the content. We do have a wall that kind of brings it together, on which you can see all the paths of people that mark their trajectory through the sand. It shows the parallel connections, and that the form of collaboration is modelled according to the network of migration, and that this reflects in some way the subject of the investigation.

BD: How important was the cultural mix of the artists in this exhibition?

UB: Well to make a statement about the Maghreb and not include Maghrebi artists would be a really silly thing to do. But the balance was lead more by content and practice than by the origin or nationality of the participants. If i had found more people, say in Morocco, who I could comfortably work with, I would have included them. But as it turned out more people in my environment here were keen in developing these practices, so I thought 'why not?' I think there is another point here; It is easier to involve young artists in committing for the period of two years to develop something new than established artists. Maybe here is the real line; I just could not find established artists who could give that kind of time to a project that was not their own idea.

BD: I am interested by this issue of time, were all participants involved for an equal amount of time in the project?

UB: No, Charles and I had a lot more to do because we were working on the whole project while others were doing their own thing within it. That said, everyone was working for at least a year and a half. Pro Helvetia asked me in 2004 if I wanted to do this big project for them, I asked them if it should be an art project or if I could involve others and they said, well it would be OK if you do something curatorial. I began work in 2005, so I had their agreement around about two years before I launched.

BD: Was Pro Helvetia the sole funding body who supported the project?

UB: No, they suggested I look for other co-funders, not only for financial reasons, but also because this would help it to have more of an impact elsewhere. So I approached the Heinrich Böll foundation in Beirut and they agreed right away, but said that they could not fund art but would support the conference and the book. Their help, which for them was a big chunk, helped us to fly in people to the conference. But Pro Helvetia paid all the research

trips, the production, the book, they really went to town with it. But, of course, that does not cover the curatorial work and I still don't know how they think one does this here. So I went to two art schools in Zurich and Geneva and together they gave me a research honorarium over two years. This allowed me to do the research but actually the huge amount of administrative curatorial work is still not covered.

BD: What were the conditions of the art academies to funding your work as research?

UB: The condition was that I would do a student workshop in both schools and some public presentations and also they need to produce research and there were not many other people ready with a project that had arms and legs like this one. So I moved in fast and got the money.

BD: Two years funding from two art schools sounds generous in relation to the usual fees and timescales available for freelancers working with public institutions. Is this a model you would use again?

UB: Well, I don't think it is very realistic to bank on the possibility of going on like this. The schools agreed to pay something because the whole production of the project was already paid by Pro Helvetia. It is not normal that they have this research money at their disposition, this was something they pulled out of their hats, because they knew they were getting an exhibition, a book and a conference, which someone else was paying for.

BD: Will this project continue to tour?

UB: Well, I have been in discussion with a number of institutions and one of them, in Granada, is very clear that they want to do it. I am quite strategic about where I want this project to be. As you may know, in Spain a lot of things depend on political decisions so we have to wait and see if there is a government change in the municipality, in which case we may not be able to do it there. Then there are thoughts about bringing it to Beirut.

BD: I wanted to talk about the reception of the project. Who were your intended public in Cairo?

UB: Well, the art circles are small, so I imagined that anyone who was vaguely interested in the arts could come by. There was a big opening and it was really packed so there was a big interest and although it is hard to say exactly who this was from, there seemed to be intellectual and artistic interest, cultural people in general and a whole bunch of NGO people who are interested in these issues. Cairo is the headquarters for the region and so there are a lot of NGO officials around, there is even development work being studied at the university, so it is almost an industry there. I was in Cairo six months beforehand to settle all the details for the exhibition and then with William we spoke about how to reach out to this public and he has excellent contacts to the NGOs because he is in a committee where they do actions

around migration. The books went out to the NGOs directly before the exhibition opened. Plus, the Cairo Biennial was taking place just a few days after our opening so we had visitors from around the region and at the press conference even journalists from Morocco and Beirut came, so I think they perceived it as a regional project which had interest and impact for their own readership.

BD: what was the press and media response to the exhibition?

UB: Well, the exhibition was reviewed widely and the level of misinformation there is considerable (laughs) they just write anything sometimes. They made stuff up, so suddenly Brian Holmes was the major funder of the project, and things like that. Television came during the opening in Cairo and interviewed the artists, along with me and William, and what they were most interested in was the way the project was developed and came about. It was very clear to them that this was not a traditional form of curatorial structure and they were interested in how 'workshop practice' as they called it offered a real potential for them to get some cultural and political discourse going in a place where democracy is not so strong. They really got it but they were critical too, saying look this is just 1000 people in a city of say 55 million, and I said "relax, we will open this exhibition, some people will write about it, we will do some workshops, publish some things and little by little, over a few years you will see, it will have an impact." It is very difficult when you see the political potential to be pleased with the little steps that an exhibition or individual works represent, and yet I truly believe in the impact of these kinds of things, but not in the immediate form of changing society right now, it just doesn't work like that.

BD: In the introduction to the book you talk of 'art re-conceived as visual geography', what do you mean by visual geography?

UB: I mean geography in the sense Irit Rogoff's uses the term, to mean a theory that can allow us to reflect on people, movement and space. Imagine doing this through a visual practice, so you think of image production in relation to the production of space, which is being formed by the movement of people. So, somehow these things have to relate to one another although its not always clear how they do this. But, its not just a visual project, we work with artistic means and that is more than just making certain hidden dynamics visual. Geography is a signifying practice to start with, through excessive visual means these days, so in that sense it is far more than a simple critique of the cartography from the nineteenth century. It's really the case that surveillance and control mechanisms produce a huge electronic world of visual expressions today, that's how they operate. So one has to intervene on this level also by producing a visual insertion of some kind.

BD: This would seem certainly to be true of your work *Agadez Chronicle*, featured in the exhibition, in which you include footage from military drones alongside images of their operators and sounds of their radio communications. There is a ready-made quality to these materials and your

strategy in using them, do you see them in this light?

UB: Well of course if the Libyan authorities had given me this footage then that would be the case but they did not, so I had to research what these things look like and then reproduce them from scratch. What you see is a complete fiction. I bought high-resolution satellite photography of the Libyan Desert and made it float as if crossing it with a drone on a surveillance mission. Now I know that Libya did buy a lot of drones from Germany, and I know that it's a reality of how they control the border, which is crossed by other people depicted in the work. In addition I introduce sound from 25 different radio and TV stations from the Middle East that I captured at the Macro-lab in Scotland. Suddenly these sounds came in handy and I could make a sort of signal territory. Its funny that you imagined that these guys with the headphones were the drone operators because these were some guys who I filmed at radio Sahara in Agadez and they were just putting up some Hip Hop. But it's a good connection somehow; maybe that is what they would look like. But for me, its clear that you need to introduce other levels of spatial analysis, which you cannot document simply by filming some people on the ground and that is all part of this technological geography.

BD: Coming back to the exhibition as a whole, how did you choose to interpret within the exhibition? I note that in Geneva you have labels with a title of the work and a short French description of what the work addresses and in some cases what processes brought it about. Is this the same method as you used in Cairo?

UB: No not at all, that was Katya's idea and she usually doesn't do that, but she felt, with this exhibition that it just helps for people to have this access to the work. Especially when some of the videos are 40 minutes long and you don't always get to see them from the beginning, at least you can see something and you know what you are looking at. I don't have a problem with the way this makes the exhibition more thematic, rather than purely relying on the artwork, in fact I think in this case its useful. In Cairo we didn't have these, but like here we had an information sheet and the big wall-map on which there are paragraphs in Arabic and English so you already have a clue about what the exhibition could be about.

BD: The works also to some extent interpret themselves.

UB: Sure, from the start we all understood that we were making work for Cairo and we wanted to be sure that they understood what we were trying to do.

BD: My last question is what remains unfinished with this project and what is to be carried on to others?

UB: I think each of the works already has some perspective for how they will go on. Raphael and Maria will stay for a while in Tunis and continue from that end. Charles has material that he might continue to work on for a second

section to his video. I just went to Mauritania to shoot new stuff that I will add to *Agadez Chronicle*. Should we show *The Maghreb Connection* in a year in Beirut we might have to think about including some of these changes, if they are finished by then, but I am not planning this particularly. I think that if I show this exhibition two more times in Granada and Beirut that would be it, and I will only do that if I have really good partners on location who can push the project in a sense that is good for the project and for their audience. I don't however want to go on doing this eternally.

BD: Will you continue to work with the same people?

UB: I like to work with new people actually. Of course with Armin Linke, we have worked together several times, this is a long-term friendship and I think we will keep doing things together. But, frankly some of the artists are quite young, which makes it very good to work with them because they are supple and still flexible, but I like different forms of collaboration. For example, I plan to go on a field trip to Lebanon with a Palestinian historian from Berkeley, and sometimes its nice to have an equal partner. Depending on what the project is I am really looking for small, concise partnerships and there are always different motivations behind these.